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A KNIGHT OF THE CROSS.



“I shall never enter Jerusalem, Wulf,” said the King.—Page 126.

TALES OF STIRRING TIMES.

A Knight of the Cross:

A Tale of the Third Crusade.

BY

C. BERNARD RUTLEY.

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TO THE READER.

THIS is not a history book, yet it contains the true story of a great enterprise. When you read of Wulf Oswald, Squire of Hawkhurst in Kent, helping to storm Messina, rescuing his comrades at Cyprus, beating off the night attack outside Acre, taking part in the relief of Joppa, or in the many other historical events which are related, you are reading about *facts*.

This is the story of the Third Crusade. It was in the First Crusade, on Friday, July 15th, 1099, that Godfrey de Bouillon and Count Raymond of Toulouse stormed their way through the broken walls of Jerusalem, and for the first time planted the Christian banners upon the battlements of the Holy City. Thereafter the Christian Kingdom of Jerusalem existed for eighty-eight years; and when at last it fell before the conquering hosts of Saladin, the nations of Europe roused themselves to win back what had been lost. So began the Third Crusade.

At this time the English King was ruler of wide domains on the Continent, and amongst the Crusaders who followed Richard to the east there were, besides his English knights and infantry, men from Normandy, Brittany, Anjou, Poitou, and Aquitaine. All these, as much as the native English, formed part of the army commanded by the English King; and so, for the purposes of the story, and to avoid unnecessary words and confusion, the writer has grouped them all together as "English." Thus, when you read of "the English army," you must remember that that army included not only Englishmen, but also men from all those continental domains which owed allegiance to the English King. The army of Saladin was also composed of many different races, and a soldier of the Saracen monarch might be an Arab, a Turk, or even a black Soudanese. It may be added that all Europeans in Palestine,

whether they were English, French, German, or Italian, were known as "Franks."

Two great orders of knighthood are mentioned in this book. The Templars were, from the beginning, an order of warrior monks, formed after the First Crusade for the protection of the pilgrims who flocked in their thousands to the Holy Land. But the Hospitallers, or the Knights of the Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem, did not start as a military order. They were first founded about the year 1023 to be the guardians of a hospital for the care of pilgrims to the Holy City, and it was not until about a hundred years later that they were compelled by the aggression of the Saracens to take up arms in defence of the holy places, and they soon developed into a powerful fighting order.

C.B.R.

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DATES OF CHIEF EVENTS MENTIONED IN THE STORY.

Jerusalem captured by Saladin	October 3rd, 1187.
Richard takes the Cross	November, 1187.
Death of Henry II	July 6th, 1189.
Richard crowned King of England	September 3rd, 1189.
Richard and Philip of France start on the Crusade	July, 1190.
Richard reaches Messina	September 23rd, 1190.
Storm and sack of Messina	October 4th, 1190.
Philip of France leaves Messina for the Holy Land	March 31st, 1191.
Richard sails from Messina	April 10th, 1191.
Richard reaches Cyprus and storms Limasol	May 6th, 1191.
Richard marries Berengaria of Navarre	May 12th, 1191.
Richard leaves Cyprus	June 5th, 1191.
Richard disembarks at Acre	June 8th, 1191.
Surrender of Acre	July 12th, 1191.
Philip of France returns home	August 3rd, 1191.
Crusaders leave Acre	August 22nd, 1191.
Battle of Arsuf	September 7th, 1191.
Joppa reached	September 10th, 1191.
Advance on Jerusalem begun from Joppa	October 31st, 1191.
Army goes into winter quarters at Ramleh.. . . .	December 8th, 1191.
Crusaders advance from Ramleh to Beit Nuba, ten miles from Jerusalem	December 28th—31st, 1191.
Crusaders retire from Beit Nuba	January 13th, 1192.
Enter Ascalon	January 22nd, 1192.
French desert Richard	April 1st, 1192.
Conrad de Montferrat killed	April 20th, 1192.
Henry of Champagne made King of Jerusalem	May 5th, 1192.
Siege and capture of Darum	May 23rd, 1192.

Richard returns to Ascalon	June 4th, 1192.
Fresh advance on Jerusalem from Ascalon	.. .	June 7th, 1192.
Beit Nuba again reached	June 11th, 1192.
Final retreat from Beit Nuba to Acre	July 5th, 1192.
Richard enters Acre	July 26th, 1192.
Joppa attacked by Saladin	July 26th, 1192.
Richard leaves Acre to relieve Joppa	July 28th, 1192.
Richard arrives off Joppa	July 31st, 1192.
Richard relieves Joppa	August 1st, 1192.
Battle of Joppa	August 4th—5th, 1192.
Truce with Saladin	September 2nd, 1192.
Richard leaves Palestine for England	October 9th, 1192.
Richard captured near Vienna on his journey home	December 20th, 1192.
Richard released by the German Emperor	February 4th, 1194.
Richard lands in England	March 12th, 1194.
Death of Richard	April 6th, 1199.

A KNIGHT OF THE CROSS:

A Tale of the Third Crusade.

CHAPTER I.

THE KNIGHT OF THE BROOM.

THWACK ! Thwack ! In a sunlit glade in the great forest of the Weald, one summer's day in the year 1189, two youths were stoutly belabouring each other with oaken quarterstaves. To and fro they trampled, circling warily round each other, and each seeking an opening through which he might deliver a stunning blow on the other's unprotected head. But the combatants were well matched, and, try as they would, neither could get through the other's guard ; so presently they fell apart, panting, and glaring at each other with angry eyes.

" You are a base traitor, Fulk Fitz Aymon ! " panted the taller of the two, a fair-haired, handsome youth, clad in doublet and hose of Lincoln green. " Now that Henry is dead, Richard is King, and I will drive it into that black pate of yours with my staff unless you admit it."

" Saxon dog ! " retorted the other, a wiry, black-haired Norman, richly clad as befitted his gentle birth, " you shall eat those words. I am no traitor, but I maintain that Richard is no King for us. He is but a bullying, blustering soldier who will away to the Holy Land as soon as he has extorted from us all the money he needs.

We want no knight-errant for King. We want a man who will stay at home and rule the land, 'and I would that King Henry could have made Prince John his heir.'"

There was, indeed, some truth in the Norman's words; and, knowing himself no match for the other in argument, the young Saxon cried out, "On guard!" The next moment the combat had joined again.

Thwack! Thwack! Thwack! Oaken staff clashed against oaken staff; and a tall man, mounted on a great horse, who had approached unobserved, and now sat watching the encounter from behind a thick bush, saw that the superior height and weight of the Saxon were beginning to tell. Thwack! Thwack! A stout blow beat down Fitz Aymon's guard; and, the next moment, the other's whirling staff crashed down on the young Norman's head, stretching him dazed and bleeding upon the grass.

Leaning on his staff, the Saxon youth regarded his fallen foe. "Now will you admit that Richard is our rightful King?" he asked. But the other, struggling to his feet, shot one furious glance at his conqueror, and with never a word slunk off through the greenwood.

For some moments the young Saxon stood gazing after him with a face whereon triumph warred with concern and dismay. Then, with something suspiciously like a sigh, he was turning away, when the stranger, who had been watching him with an amused smile, rode forward into the open.

"You look strangely sad for one who has just won a notable victory, good youth," he cried.

"Indeed, Sir Knight," replied the boy, noting at a glance the stranger's stalwart build, the proud head and finely formed features crowned with a profusion of golden hair, the golden beard, the rich habiliments of man and horse, and the knightly spurs, "indeed, now that it is done I can but call myself a fool."

"What, sirrah ! A fool for maintaining Richard's right to be King ? "

"Nay, Lord," replied the youth, his eyes flashing, "that I will maintain whatever happens ; yet I was a fool to let my temper get the better of my judgment. For myself I care not ; indeed, I long to leave these woods where nothing ever happens, and go out into the world. 'Tis of my mother I think. Raulf Fitz Aymon, the father of him I smote, holds us in the hollow of his hand. There was a time when my ancestors possessed all the land for miles around. But now Raulf Fitz Aymon holds it, and I, the last of the House of Oswald, live with my mother in the Hall which, with a few acres of land, is all that remains of my inheritance. Even that the Norman covets, and he waits but an excuse to take all, and turn my mother out in want and beggary. Therefore I call myself a fool ; for in my temper I have given him the excuse he needs, and King Richard, in whose cause I fought, will reck nothing of our wrongs."

The knight pulled his beard thoughtfully, and he was about to speak, when the drumming of hoofs smote upon their ears, and into the glade there galloped a tall, handsome girl, mounted on a white horse.

With never a glance at the knight she reined in



‘Into the glade galloped a tall, handsome girl.’—Page 3.

beside the young Saxon, and, gazing down upon him with a troubled face, burst out, "What have you done now, Wulf? Are you mad? But a minute ago I met Fulk, his head all bloody, and he said that you had struck him, and vows that Father shall burn the Hall, and turn you and the Lady Winfrid out into the woods."

"Nay, Lady," put in the knight, "that cannot be. I myself saw your brother take his wound in fair fight, whilst the lad here did but uphold Richard's right to be King."

"It matters not if they fought fairly or why," cried the girl. "This is the excuse they need. I have done my best to make Father hold his hand, but now ——"

"Nay, fret not, Isabel," interrupted Wulf. "You can do no more. 'Tis my hasty temper that is to blame. For myself I care not, but Mother —— Perhaps the good sisters at Stone Cross will shelter her."

"It shall not be!" cried the girl. "What do we want with more land? Wulf, get you back to Hawk-hurst, and I will ride swiftly home, and tell Father the truth about this encounter, before Fulk whispers lies into his ears." Then, wheeling her horse, she dashed away down a green forest ride.

"You seem to have stirred a hornets' nest, my friend," said the stranger. "Loyalty, methinks, does not pay in this part of England. Say, boy, can you give me shelter? I am far from where I thought to lie this night, and, moreover, a good sword, or the presence of

one who can uphold your story, may prove useful ere long."

"Indeed, Lord," cried Wulf eagerly, "you will be right welcome to what hospitality we can give. Will it please you to ride by my side? Hawkhurst lies an hour through the forest, and I must return and make ready to receive Raulf Fitz Aymon when he comes."

For some time the two passed silently through the forest, where the sun made golden tracery on tree trunk and greensward. Presently the stranger spoke. "Wulf," he said, "I know more of the ways of men than you. Will you leave the straightening of this coil to me, and obey my orders? If so, I promise there shall be no burning this night."

Wulf considered the offer in silence. "Indeed, Lord," he answered at last, "I doubt not you will straighten this dispute better than I, who am too wont to strike before I think, and so I promise to obey."

"Good youth!" exclaimed the knight, approvingly, and went on to relate tales of fighting in foreign lands, which set Wulf's blood afire, and made the way to Hawkhurst seem all too short.

"Now, Wulf," said his companion, as they crossed the bridge which spanned the ditch surrounding a stout wooden palisade, "warn your mother that Fitz Aymon may ride this way to-night, but make no other preparations. I am hungry, lad; there will be time in plenty to devise ways to defeat this Norman, when he comes."

Wulf hesitated a moment. Not thus would he have prepared to receive his powerful neighbour. Then,

remembering his promise, and feeling, moreover, a strange confidence in his noble-looking companion, he nodded his understanding, and led the way through stout oaken gates into a large courtyard, in the centre of which stood his home, a large building, half timber, half brick.

"Welcome to Hawkhurst, Sir Knight!" said Wulf.
"By what name shall I present you to my mother?"

"Name?" repeated the knight, plainly taken aback. "Name, lad! Call me the *Knight of the Broom*. 'Twill serve as well as another."

Entering the house, Wulf led the stranger to the guest-chamber that he might remove the stains of travel, and then conducted him to the great hall where the Lady Winfrid awaited them, and where food was already spread upon long tables.

The hall of Hawkhurst was a large chamber where Wulf and all his household lived. Rushes lay strewn upon the floor. There were two great open fireplaces where logs blazed in the freezing winters, whilst at one end was a raised dais whereon Wulf, and his mother, and any noble guests they might be entertaining, took their meals.

As they ate, the talk naturally turned to the new King, and the coming Crusade. "Yes, King Richard will go to the rescue of the Holy Sepulchre," said the stranger. "You have heard that Jerusalem and the true Cross have fallen into the hands of the Saracen Emperor, Saladin. Acre, Ascalon, Joppa, and many other towns have all been captured by the same enemy.

Of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, Tyre alone remains in Christian hands."

Much more he told them. He told them how Conrad de Montferrat had repulsed the Emperor Saladin and his choicest troops from before the walls of Tyre—how Richard and Philip II of France had agreed to set forth for the Holy Land the following year—and how thousands of armed pilgrims, impatient of delay, were even then flocking to Palestine to help the gallant Guy of Lusignan to regain his kingdom.

Wulf sat listening to the brave recital with flashing eyes, and at last, unable to keep silent any longer, he burst out, "Oh! why can't *I* go and strike a blow for the Cross, instead of spending my time hunting, or quarrelling with that knave Fulk?"

"You are over young, lad," replied the knight, smiling. "And yet you are strong and big of frame, and a lusty fighter, as I have seen this afternoon. Lady," he added, turning to the Lady Winfrid, "methinks 'tis time the boy was loosed from his mother's apron-strings."

A sorrowful smile spread over the beautiful face of the Lady Winfrid. "'Tis not I who keep him tied to my apron-strings, Sir Knight," she answered proudly, "but dire necessity. To say truth, we are poor, and even the little we have our neighbour would take from us. When the last of the House of Oswald rides to war, he must go armed as befits his lineage, and not as a common fighting-man."

"By the Cross! you speak truth, Lady, and I am

sad to see so noble a family reduced to such straits. I myself —”

Thundering knocks upon the outer gate interrupted the speaker, and the next moment Huda, Wulf's steward, rushed into the hall, crying, “Master, Raulf Fitz Aymon is at the gate with his son and thirty men-at-arms, and he threatens to force an entrance, unless he is at once admitted.”

Wulf's hand flew to his sword, and a defiant answer was trembling on his lips, when the Knight of the Broom laid a restraining hand upon his arm. “Open, lad,” he murmured. “Trust me. Now sit down, and drink your wine. Look not so fierce; appear as though it were a common thing for your neighbour to call upon you thus. Fear not, Fitz Aymon shall return like a dog with its tail between its legs.”

Thus it happened that when the Norman baron clanked into the torch-lit hall at the head of his armed men, instead of a panic-stricken household he beheld its master and mistress, and a richly apparelled guest, gravely sipping their wine at the raised table.

“My Lord Fitz Aymon,” cried Wulf, rising to his feet, “welcome to Hawkhurst, though indeed 'tis unusual for neighbours to call with armed men and drawn swords.” And he glanced significantly at the gleaming blade in the other's hand.

“Varlet !” shouted the Norman, enraged at Wulf's calm manner, “think not to deceive me with honeyed words. I have borne your insolence long enough, and a dungeon awaits you where you can cool that hot head

of yours. As for the Saxon woman, your mother, I give her till to-morrow's eve to seek refuge where she may, ere I burn this den of rogues."

"Dog!" cried Wulf, infuriated beyond measure at the Norman's insolent allusion to his mother, "you shall take back those words." And, drawing his sword, he was about to spring at his enemy, when a grip of steel closed upon his arm, and he was dragged forcibly back by the strange knight.

"My Lord Fitz Aymon," said the knight, "there is some mistake here. I myself saw the encounter between your son and the Squire of Hawkhurst, and can testify that your son spoke treason, and that this youth did but chastise him as he deserved." Then, his voice becoming suddenly stern, he added, "Go home, Baron, and cleanse your own household of treason ere you come burning the homes of loyal men."

For some moments Fitz Aymon was too enraged at this interruption to speak. Then he burst out, "Who in the fiend's name are you?"

"Call me the Knight of the Broom."

"Then, Knight of the Broom," stormed Fitz Aymon, "get you gone, or you shall share a dungeon with this Saxon churl. There are chains in plenty in my keep." And he was about to order his men to seize Wulf, when the Knight of the Broom spoke again.

"By the Cross! do you speak of chains and dungeons to me? Fool, are you tired of life that you threaten the Knight of the Broom? Go, ere I order your own followers to seize you."

With mouth agape the Norman stared at the tall man upon the dais. Then, as his son whispered in his ear, his rage turned to dismay. *Knight of the Broom!* It could not be. Yet there were the same noble proportions, the same handsome face and auburn hair. "Sire!" he murmured, and fell upon one knee.

"Ah!" cried the King, for such indeed was the Knight of the Broom, "who speaks of chains and dungeons now? By the Holy Rood! Raulf Fitz Aymon, I am minded to cast you and that whelp of yours into one of your own cells.—A mistake! I doubt it not. Out of my sight, ere I regret my mercy. And remember that this youth and his lady mother, and all that they possess, are under my royal protection; so trouble them at your peril. Stay!" he called, as the Norman and his followers were slinking from the hall. "Soon shall I be starting to the rescue of the Holy Sepulchre, and I am minded that your son shall accompany me. Maybe he will learn a warmer loyalty 'neath a hotter sun."

"Sire!" began Wulf, when the gates had clanged behind the Norman and his men; but the King waved him to silence.

"Forget it, lad," he said, "'tis but a small repayment for your loyalty. Also to-night let me be plain Knight of the Broom; sometimes indeed I wish I were nothing more. Often I tire of statesmanship, and would go knight-erranting, I who have ever delighted in deeds more than in words.—But now let us talk together awhile. Lady, Fitz Aymon will trouble you no more—I will see to that—and so methinks Wulf might be spared

to see something of the world. I myself will provide for him so that he may go as befits his rank. 'Say, lad, will you come with me to the Holy Land, and strike a blow for the Cross ?'

"Right joyously!" cried Wulf. Then, seeing the sorrow in his mother's face, he threw his arms round her neck, and cried, "'Tis but for a year or two, Mother, and then I shall return."

"Indeed, Wulf, you must go," answered the Lady Winfrid, bravely smiling. "My liege, I thank you. I know you will see that he is trained in all that befits a true knight."

"Trust me, Lady," replied the King heartily. "So 'tis settled. Heigho! I am sleepy. Lad, I would to bed. To-morrow I must arise with the sun. I doubt not my trusty rogues are wondering what has become of their errant King. I fear I lead them a sad life at times. Thank Heaven, lad, you are not a King. 'Tis better far to strike good blows as a simple knight, and fret not for the consequences, than to spend your time thinking of what will happen if you do this or that, and making friends of enemies, as I have to do."

CHAPTER II.

A JOUST IN THE FOREST.

The sun shining in his eyes awoke Wulf the next morning. Remembering the events of the previous night, he sprang out of bed; and, having quickly dressed, he hastened to the guest-chamber.

But the chamber was empty, nor was there any sign of the King; so Wulf called Huda, the steward, and questioned him if he had seen aught of the Knight of the Broom.

"He departed an hour ago, Master," replied the steward. "He would not let me wake you, nor would he eat before he left. A horn of ale he drank, and then he rode off singing.—Yes, Master, he left a message. He told me to give you his thanks, and to say that he would not forget."

Wulf felt rather hurt at the King's abrupt departure; but when the Lady Winfrid heard of it, she expressed no surprise.

"From all I have heard of King Richard, he is like that, Wulf, so think him not ungrateful. You have made a powerful friend, as I think you will discover ere long."

Later in the morning, as he was strolling in the woods near the house, Wulf heard his name called, and saw Isabel Fitz Aymon riding towards him through the trees.

"What is this I hear, Wulf? Father and Fulk returned last night in great anger. They said they had found the King at Hawkhurst, and that he had taken you under his protection. But they would tell me nothing more; so I came away this morning, unknown to Father, to hear the truth from your lips."

Briefly Wulf related the events of the previous night.

"I *am* glad!" cried the girl, when he had finished.

"Though, Wulf, I shall miss you sorely when you ride to the wars."

"And I shall miss you, Isabel," replied Wulf. "But I cannot stop in these woods all my life; and, moreover, it seems to me that here is my opportunity not only to strike a blow for the Cross, but also to regain some of the lost honours of my House. Did they tell you that King Richard commanded Fulk to take the Cross?"

"No!" exclaimed the girl. Then she added, "I am glad of that, too. He will be a sort of hostage to make Father keep peace whilst you are away."

Soon afterwards the girl rode home, and Wulf returned to Hawkhurst, where he found a grizzled man-at-arms awaiting his coming. The fellow bestrode a great war-horse, and led another laden with chain-mail, weapons, and bags which, later on, Wulf discovered to contain rich apparel.

"I am Thibaut, young sir, and I bear a message from the Knight of the Broom," replied the soldier in answer to Wulf's greeting. "He bids you accept the gift of this horse and all that it carries, and to receive me into your household so that I may teach you the use of sword and axe, and how to run a course with a lance. He also bade me say that you are to bide here until he sends for you."

Wulf was overjoyed at the prompt fulfilment of the King's promise; and, day after day, he and Thibaut practised together with sword, and axe, and lance. At first Wulf cut but a sorry figure in his encounters with the skilful man-at-arms. But gradually, as the days

grew to weeks, and the weeks to months, he began to hold his own, until one December day, at the close of a sharp bout in which Wulf's sword had twice clanged on Thibaut's steel cap, the man-at-arms said,

"I have taught you all I can, lad, so to-morrow I leave Hawkhurst.—Nay, I may not stay ; 'tis the King's command. What he intends concerning you I know not. But, lad, if you continue as you have begun, you will make a fighter able to hold his own against any save King Richard himself."

True to his word, the next day, a bright, frosty morning with snow upon the ground, Thibaut rode away, and thereafter for many days Wulf wandered listlessly around, longing for someone with whom to fight, and wondering if Richard had forgotten him after all.

Little news of the outer world reached Hawkhurst. They had heard, indeed, that Richard had been crowned King at Westminster ; also, that he was busy raising men and money for the Crusade, and arranging for the government of the country during his absence. But of the date when the King intended to start, they knew nothing.

One morning, about a fortnight after Thibaut had left, Huda sought Wulf to say that a strange knight requested speech with him at the outer gate. Astonished, Wulf ran out to find a short, sturdy man, clad from head to foot in shining chain-mail, sitting patiently upon a great war-horse.

"Young sir," boomed the stranger, as Wulf appeared, "I have heard that you are skilled in arms ;

so, being a humble knight-errant in search of honour, I beg you to meet me in friendly encounter with lance, sword, and axe, for our mutual advancement, and the glory of our ladies."

Wulf was so amazed at this request that he was nearly confessing he was only a beginner; but he suddenly realized that here was a real knight against whom to practise his new-learned skill. Accordingly he hastily answered as befitted the occasion, and then retired into the house, whence he soon came forth clad in full mail.

The order of combat was soon arranged, and, on the stranger's suggestion that they should first run a course with lances, Wulf led the way on his great war-horse to the clearing where he and Thibaut had been wont to run against each other.

"'Tis indeed a most excellent spot for a knightly joust," exclaimed the stranger, gazing around. "Let us now take post at opposite ends of this glade, and ride against each other, so that we may see who is the better man."

As Wulf took his place opposite his opponent, for the first time in his life he felt nervous. Suppose he failed in this, his first real encounter? He felt very inexperienced. Then, seeing that the stranger was ready, he lowered his lance, and dug his spurs into his horse's flanks.

The great animal seemed to fling itself forward. As Wulf felt the surge of the mighty muscles beneath him, all nervousness vanished, and in a flash he realized that it was for Isabel's sake he wanted to acquit himself

well. The stranger was almost upon him now, and, crouching low, Wulf aimed at the centre of his opponent's shield. Crash ! A mighty jar, and then, with a rending of ash, the stout lances splintered, and the two combatants galloped past each other, Wulf reeling slightly under the shock, the stranger sitting firm as a rock in his saddle.

"A fair course, young sir !" cried Wulf's opponent, reining in his steed. "Shall we ride another ?"

So they took fresh lances, and again charged at each other across the length of the green forest glade. Again the lances struck fairly in the centre of each shield ; but whilst his own lance splintered, leaving his adversary unmoved, Wulf suddenly felt himself lifted bodily out of his saddle, and the next moment he was lying on the soft, springy turf.

"Well run, young sir !" cried the stranger, as he helped Wulf to his feet. "When you have reached my age, 'twill take a better man than I to cast you from your saddle. Now rest awhile, and then, if you are willing, we will continue this debate with swords."

But Wulf was so impatient to continue the joust that he could not rest. He had suffered no harm from his fall, and he was eager to wipe out the defeat he had received at the hands of this doughty stranger, who rode as though he were fixed to his saddle. So, without more ado, they seized their swords and fell to work on foot.

Wulf soon discovered that his opponent was as skilled with his sword as with his lance, and was one

against whom it would require all his skill to hold his own ; so he fought warily, content for a time to defend himself against the other's attacks, In and out flashed the swords, round and round circled the combatants, each seeking an opening in the other's guard. Once Wulf thought he saw his chance, and drove home his sword ; but, the next instant, the blow was parried, and Wulf sprang back just in time to escape a lightning cut from the other's weapon.

Wulf breathed quickly. Of course, it had been a snare to entrap him. He resolved that the stranger should not tempt him again. He would be more wary in future, and with that intent Wulf returned to his defensive tactics. But now, of a sudden, the stranger began to press him harder. Cut, parry, thrust ; cut, parry, thrust ! Round and round, in and out, whirled the gleaming blades ; then there came a sudden slither of steel on steel, and Wulf felt his sword wrenched from his hand, and saw it circling through the air, to fall to the ground some yards away.

" A brave encounter, young sir ! " said the stranger, picking up Wulf's sword. " Let us rest awhile to get our breath, and then we will take a turn with axes."

This time Wulf's greater height and reach gave him an advantage over the other, and more than once he almost got home on the stranger's helm. But his opponent was old and tried in the game, and for a while evaded all Wulf's onslaughts. Crash ! Crash ! Axe clashed against axe, and then, for an instant, the stranger left his head unguarded. Down came Wulf's axe, the

flat striking the other full upon his steel cap, and stretching him dazed upon the ground.

"Beshrew me, lad!" cried the knight, sitting up and blinking dazedly at Wulf, whilst a humorous smile overspread his face. "Had I a lady, methinks she had gained little honour from this encounter. But I am too old for a lady's favour. I am past the age when a man ties a lady's glove to his helm; but you, lad—why, you want but a pair of bright eyes to fight for, and a little more practice, and you will be as stout a fighter as ever couched a lance. Help me up, lad. Thibaut, my man, has trained you well, and King Richard will be pleased."

"Thibaut, King Richard, why ——"

"Tush, lad! I misled you, I confess, but I did not want you to know that I had come to try your mettle. So for an hour I played the knight-errant in search of honour, and all I've won is a bruised pate. Lad, I am Sir Richard de Camville, and you are to come with me to Court. Can you ride to-morrow?"

"Indeed I can," cried Wulf joyously; and, leading the knight into the house, he presented him to the Lady Winfrid. Thereafter there was much to be done—apparel to be prepared, arms and mail to be burnished until they shone like silver; yet, with it all, Wulf found time that afternoon to ride through the forest to Colenham Castle, where Raulf Fitz Aymon lived. There, in sight of a certain window in the grim fortress, he tied a white cloth to a certain tree, and then rode away to a secret glade, where he waited until Isabel joined him.



“‘Beshrew me, lad!’ cried the knight, sitting up.’—Page 19.

"What has happened, Wulf?" she asked anxiously, for they had agreed to make that signal only in case of urgent necessity.

Briefly Wulf related the events of the morning. "And so I go to-morrow, Isabel, and I felt I must see you to say good-bye, and ——"

"Why, of course, dear Wulf," answered the girl. "I shall miss you sorely, and shall wait eagerly for your return. But what is the other request you wish to make?" And she smiled.

Wulf stammered and went red. "Sir Richard, this morning, bade me fight for the honour of my lady, and I did, though of course I hadn't any lady to fight for, only I —— Oh! can't you see, Isabel? I fought for *you*. And will you be my lady, and give me something to wear in my helm when I ride to battle?" Having blurted out his request, Wulf grew redder than ever as he anxiously awaited her answer.

"Why, of course, Wulf; I shall be proud, proud to be your lady." And, leaning forward in her saddle, the girl suddenly kissed Wulf on the cheek. Then, before he could stop her, she had wheeled her horse and ridden away, leaving in his hand a purple scarf.

The next morning Wulf bade his mother farewell, and then he and Sir Richard de Camville, with one serving man to drive a pack-horse laden with their mail and spare gear, set out for Canterbury, where the King was sitting in council. Two days they spent on their journey, and, arriving at their destination late in the afternoon, rode straight to the palace.

Never before had Wulf seen so many people as the crowd of nobles, knights, and squires who thronged the King's Court, and he was heartily glad when Sir Richard de Camville came and fetched him, and led him to a room where the King stood alone before a great, crackling fire.

"Welcome, lad," cried the King, as Wulf fell upon one knee. "I hear you show promise of being a lusty fighter. I would I could have seen you give Sir Richard that clout over the head." And he burst into a great laugh. "By the Cross! lad, but you have spread out since I saw you last," he continued, laying a hand on Wulf's shoulder, and regarding him with an approving eye. "Sir Richard, this youth pleases me; so train him well, not only in arms, but in minstrelsy, and the arts of peace, and all that a youth of gentle birth should know."

Two days later the King and his Court left Canterbury for Dover, Wulf riding behind Sir Richard de Camville as his squire. They crossed to Normandy and kept Christmas at Bures, where Wulf, with a number of other noble youths, took the Cross, swearing to proceed to the Holy Land and fight the enemies of the faith.

Then followed long weeks of preparation for the coming Crusade, Wulf devoting all the time he could to practising with his weapons, in the use of which he became so skilled that there was soon no one of his own age at Court who could stand against him.

At last, with the coming of spring, the time of preparation drew to a close. On June 26th, 1190, Richard with his household troops left Tours for Vézelay in Bur-

gundy, where he met Philip and the French contingent. But Sir Richard de Camville and Wulf did not march with them ; for, early in the year, Sir Richard had taken command of part of the English fleet, and at the beginning of April he and Wulf had boarded the flagship of their little squadron, and with a favourable breeze had set sail for Marseilles, where they were to meet the King.

CHAPTER III.

A BRUSH WITH THE MOORS.

From many ports in England, Normandy, Brittany, and Poitou, fleets, such as that commanded by Sir Richard de Camville, had put forth. The ships were small and clumsy, and they sailed slowly down the coasts of France and Spain, never going far from the shore. In this manner Sir Richard's fleet at length reached Portugal, where King Sancho I. waged war with the Moors.

"It seems to me, Wulf," said Sir Richard de Camville one day, "that much dishonour will attach to us if we pass this country without striking a blow at these Moors, who are as much enemies to the faith as any emir in Saladin's army. Richard would be the first to aid King Sancho, were he here ; and 'twill be but for a week or two at most. What think you, lad ? Do you not agree with me ?"

"Indeed, Sir Knight," answered Wulf, overjoyed at the prospect of the adventure, "I think you are right. The Portuguese cavaliers will indeed have cause

to think poorly of us, if we pass without striking a blow in their aid."

"I am glad you agree with me, Wulf," replied the knight gravely, "for I know your judgment to be such as can be relied upon. Now go and bid the ship-master signal the other vessels to close in, and then invite all knights to come on board this ship, so 'that I may enlist their aid in this venture."

Half an hour later fifty famous knights were gathered on the deck of the little vessel, listening whilst Sir Richard unfolded his plans.

"'Tis indeed a noble thought," cried a knight, Sir Walter D'Arcy by name, when Sir Richard had finished, "and I for one shall not consider myself fit to set foot in the Holy Land, unless I slay at least three of these same Moors with mine own hand."

The other knights also expressed their approval of the venture, and so, the fleet being near land, Sir Richard went ashore to learn the whereabouts of King Sancho.

He soon returned with the news that the Moorish army was besieging the town of Santarem, some thirty miles inland, and that King Sancho was endeavouring to relieve the city. On that there was much discussion, some knights wishing to proceed to Lisbon, and thence sail up the Tagus to the Christian camp, whilst others declared that such a route would cause delay, and that they should land at once and march overland to the aid of King Sancho.

At length, by a majority, the latter course was decided upon, and the knights landed with their squires

and men-at-arms, whilst the fleet set sail for Lisbon, there to await the adventurers' return.

It was a desolate shore upon which the little English army of five hundred men found itself. The half-Moorish inhabitants fled at their approach, and it was with great difficulty that they found anybody willing to guide them to Santarem. At last, however, a slim, brown-skinned youth offered his services, and, in reply to the eager inquiries of the English knights, volunteered to guide them by a route which would take them close to a hill fort held by a Moorish chieftain and his followers.

"'Twill be a right gallant venture," cried Sir Walter. "If we take this fort, the Portuguese cavaliers, who, I hear, are very gallant men, cannot but think well of us."

The way thither was across a flat plain towards a range of mountains; and as they rode forward, the English beheld many signs of the war which was being constantly waged between Moor and Christian. Here and there the charred ruins of a burnt village, inhabited only by a few starving dogs, stood amidst land which had once been green with ripening grain. The white skeletons of horses showed by the wayside, whilst once a body of lightly armed Moorish horsemen rode towards them, until, noting the strength and warlike appearance of the strangers, they turned and galloped away ere the English could attack.

Evening found the English at the foot of the mountains, which towered above them, bare and forbidding, and broken by deep, dark gorges. A half-ruined village

served them for camp, and with the first rays of the morning sun they continued the march.

The way took them through a deep gorge, along the bottom of which dashed a mountain stream. There was no road, the track, such as it was, winding in and out amongst the boulders which the stream had brought down in time of flood, or ascending the dry bed of some mountain torrent, overhung by immense precipices which cast an unnatural gloom even on the brightest day.

As they proceeded, sometimes on horseback, at others scrambling on foot up steep declivities where they had to drag their horses after them, Wulf, who rode with Sir Richard in the van, caught the knight glancing anxiously at the towering cliffs which hemmed them in on either side.

"A bad place to meet an enemy, lad!" remarked Sir Richard, in answer to Wulf's inquiring glance. "They could line the tops of yonder cliffs, and kill us like rats, without our being able to strike a blow. I trust our guide is true. We are unused to this sort of warfare, and in our zeal may well fall into a trap."

"I have had the same thought, Sir Richard," replied Wulf. "Give me leave to ride ahead, and watch against surprise."

"A good idea, lad! But go warily. There is no honour to be gained by being struck down by an enemy you cannot see. Take this horn. Should you be assailed, sound it, and we will hasten to your aid."

Setting spurs to his horse, for here the ground was level, Wulf galloped on ahead, and was soon lost to view



‘The way took them through a deep gorge.’—Page 26.

round a bend in the ravine. How lonely it was away from his companions ! For the first time Wulf realized the utter silence of that mountain gorge, broken only by the echoing clang of his charger's iron-shod hoofs.

Glancing to right and left, searching every clump of bushes and litter of boulders with his eyes, Wulf pressed forward. He had covered about a mile, and was leading his horse over a particularly rough piece of ground, when he thought he saw something move amongst some boulders a short way ahead. Halting, he scanned the rocks intently. Not a sound broke the silence, not a thing stirred. Reassured, he started forward again, and was passing round a large rock, when some dark and heavy fabric was suddenly flung over him, enveloping him from head to foot in hampering, clinging folds.

Desperately Wulf struggled to get free, so that he might once sound his horn ; but the next moment a dozen pairs of hands seized him, his horn and sword were wrenched from his grasp, ropes were passed round his limbs, and he was lifted and borne away, he knew not whither.

Very bitter were Wulf's thoughts, as his captors carried him rapidly through the mountains. He had failed—failed to warn his companions of the very danger he had been set to guard against. He would never be able to hold up his head again. He was a prisoner, taken by a simple ruse in his first real encounter, before he had struck a single blow. A poor soldier of the Cross he would make, if he went on like this. What would

Isabel think of him—Isabel who had accepted him as her knight, and had given him her scarf to wear ?

Presently the cloth was removed, his bonds were cut, and he was made to understand that he must walk. Resistance was useless ; so, putting on the best face he could, Wulf started forward between his captors up a narrow mountain track. Up, up they climbed until the muscles of Wulf's legs, unused to such exertion, felt as though they were being torn asunder ; then, just when he felt he could go no farther, they suddenly emerged on to the flat summit of a mountain ridge, from which a wide panorama of the surrounding country was visible.

A number of Moors already occupied the summit of the ridge, and Wulf noticed that they were all gazing in one direction. Glancing the same way, Wulf saw that the ridge sloped steeply down to a wide valley, in the centre of which, perched upon a solitary hill, stood a Moorish castle. But what held his eyes, and sent a thrill through his blood, was the sight of a glittering column winding out of a side gully into the valley. Could they be his friends ? Yes, Heaven be praised ! they were. He could see Sir Richard's banner in the van. So they had escaped the ambush. Ah ! in the valley below, a trumpet had blared, and the English were spreading out to surround the castle.

His captors now bound Wulf again, and then took no further notice of him. From where he lay, Wulf could see all that took place in the valley beneath. He saw the first attack surge up the hill to be repulsed by the

garrison, of the castle. He watched breathlessly, as a little body of mail-clad soldiers made a desperate assault on the castle gate, to be rolled back again with sadly diminished numbers. Then, during a lull in the attack below, his attention was attracted by what was going on around him. The number of Moors on the ridge was increasing rapidly. Parties of the enemy came toiling up the slope, laden with brushwood, which they piled in great heaps all along the edge of the cliff. What fiendish scheme, wondered Wulf, had they in mind?

By this time it was getting dark, and suddenly from the Moors around him burst cries of rage. Glancing down into the valley, Wulf saw the cause of their anger. The English had at last forced their way into the castle; and, even as he watched, clouds of smoke, shot with leaping flames, rose from the doomed building.

Their work finished, the English showed signs of preparing to depart. Surely, thought Wulf, they were not going to traverse those defiles at night, with a vindictive enemy on every height. But probably they were unaware that the Moors were gathered to dispute their march. Below, he could see the glittering squadrons being marshalled in the last sunlight; then, noticing the looks of fierce anticipation on the swarthy faces around him, Wulf realized the full extent of the terrible danger which threatened his friends.

They must be warned, but how? Fortunately the Moors were too intent on their preparations to heed their captive. Stealthily Wulf strained at his bonds, and was overjoyed to find that he could loosen them enough to

free his hands. But he must wait for darkness. Everything depended on him. If he failed ——

But he was not going to fail this time.

In another half-hour it was dark, except for a faint lurid glow from the blazing castle. Stealthily glancing around, and making sure that he was unobserved, Wulf freed his hands, and in another minute had loosened the bonds about his feet.

It was the work of a moment to slip behind a rock, and then, bending low in order not to show against the skyline, Wulf ran to the edge of the ridge, and commenced the steep descent into the valley.

It was a perilous journey in the dark, nor was there time to pick his way. Down, down he went, stumbling over rocks, slipping, sliding, and every moment expecting to hear the hue and cry raised behind him. Once he almost ran into a party of Moors ascending the ridge, for he saw them only just in time to take cover behind a thorn hush. Then on again, down to the valley below, from which, ever and anon, there arose the clank of mail, and the measured tramp of feet.

As he descended, the glare from the burning castle grew stronger, and he was able to make greater speed. He was almost running now in his impatience. Down, down, and then he stopped just in time to escape crashing over a precipice which fell a sheer hundred feet to the valley below.

There must be a path somewhere, he thought. Frantically Wulf rushed hither and thither, seeking the track down the cliff, whilst louder and ever louder

sounded, the tramp of the English chivalry as they marched into the ravine.

At last Wulf found a narrow track leading zigzag down the cliff, and, racing down it, he ran towards the nearest troops, shouting the alarm as he ran.

"Whom have we here?" cried a voice, and a steel-clad figure left the throng of soldiers, and approached Wulf.

In the glare of the burning castle Wulf recognized Sir Walter D'Arcy with a cry of joy. "Sir Walter," he panted, "stop the army! They are marching to death! The cliffs above the ravine are thick with Moors, who wait only till the troops are entangled in the mountains to shower death upon them."

"Who are you, lad, and how come you by these tidings?" asked the Englishman.

"I am Wulf Oswald of Hawkhurst, Sir Walter, squire to Sir Richard de Camville. This day, as I rode ahead to guard against surprise, I was myself surprised by some Moors, and carried away captive. They bound me, and from where I lay I saw the storming of the castle, and watched the Moors preparing their attack. Then with darkness I managed to escape, and am here to warn you."

"By the Cross! lad, I fear you are too late," answered the other. "Half the army are already on the march."

For a moment Wulf was silent, stunned by the thought of the awful disaster which threatened his friends; then, "Sir Richard?" he asked.

"With the advance guard," he was told.

The reply seemed to stir Wulf to action. "Listen, Sir Walter," he cried. "There is yet time. The Moors will withhold their attack until they are sure the whole army is amongst the mountains, and there is no retreat. The way I came down, I and others can go up. Give me a sword and some men, and I will attack the Moors in the rear, where they least expect it, and those we do not slay we will drive over the precipice."

"Brave youth!" cried Sir Walter. "'Tis a most knightly venture, and I myself will follow you. Here, take this sword. I have an axe that will serve me this night."

Having dispatched a messenger to stop the farther advance of the army, Sir Walter hastily marshalled his following on foot, and then bade Wulf lead the way.

It was difficult work climbing the narrow path, and Wulf chafed at the slow progress of the men-at-arms, as they laboriously climbed the steep track. Every moment, from the ridge above, he expected to hear the yell that would tell him the slaughter had begun—to hear the crash of falling rocks, and the faint cries of men trapped to their death. He could see nothing. The castle had burned itself out, and the night had grown suddenly dark. Oh, hurry, hurry!

"We are all here, lad." Sir Walter's voice came out of the darkness beside Wulf, and with a sigh of relief he led the way up the slope. Up, up they went. Now and then a metal scabbard clanked against a rock, and every moment Wulf expected to hear the rush of charging men,

and to find himself engaged in a desperate hand-to-hand fight. But the Moors were too engrossed in listening to the progress of the army below, to think of danger from their rear; and the English had mounted three-quarters of the way, when suddenly a ruddy glare shot skywards from all along the summit of the ridge.

Looking up, Wulf saw that the Moors had set fire to the great piles of brushwood, and at the same moment he heard the dull crash of falling rocks, and the faint shouts and cries of stricken men.

The men-at-arms needed no urging. Silently they broke into a run; yet they could not keep pace with Wulf, who, being lighter and swifter of foot, was the first to reach the summit. A weird and terrible sight met his eyes. All along the ridge great fires blazed, casting a ruddy glow into the deep gorge, and throwing into bold relief scores of dark figures leaping madly from rock to rock, or leaning over the precipice edge, casting down stones and javelins upon the helpless soldiers below. Then with a silent, deadly rush the English were upon the Moors.

The surprise was complete. The Moors in front of the English had hardly time to cry out before they were cut down, or cast bodily over the precipice; then, swinging round, the English charged along the ridge.

Wulf had his fill of fighting, that night. Ever in the front beside Sir Walter, he swung his long blade until the Moors shrank back aghast from the young giant who fought so desperately.

Sir Richard was in the van. He must save Sir

Richard : this was the thought that drummed in Wulf's brain, as he fought his way foot by foot along the ridge. The Moors had long ceased to cast rocks and javelins upon the army below, and had gathered all their strength to meet the attack on their rear. Fiercer and fiercer grew the fight. In the ruddy glare of the blazing fires Moor and Christian fought with desperate hatred. Men grappled, and, locked in each other's arms, reeled over the precipice, to be dashed to pieces on the rocks below. There was no quarter given, none asked ; and gradually, as the greater number of the Moors began to tell, the English advance stopped ; then, with half their number slain, they were slowly forced back.

" Brave youth," praised Sir Walter in a brief lull in the fight, " you have gained much honour this night, and if we have to die soon, as it seems we must, yet we can die knowing we have saved the army."

Now, step by step, the English were forced back, until, with but twenty left, they formed a ring, and prepared to make their last stand. In vain the Moors cast themselves upon that circle of steel. For full a quarter of an hour the ring remained unbroken ; then, too weary to lift his sword, an Englishman fell, and instantly the Moors burst through the breach, and the surviving English were broken up into little isolated groups, desperately struggling in a raging sea of enemies.

" 'Tis the end, lad," gasped Sir Walter, felling a turbaned Moor. He and Wulf were fighting back to back, and for a few minutes crashing axe and whirling sword kept their enemies at bay. Then Sir Walter went

down, stunned by a crushing blow upon his steel head-piece, and, standing over him, Wulf continued the hopeless contest.

The end, yes ! The end of glory and honour. He would never see Hawkhurst again, nor Isabel. Wulf's sword sought an enemy and found none, and then he heard a noise of rushing feet, and the next moment he was conscious of mail-clad figures that dashed past him after the flying Moors.

Saved ! It seemed impossible. How weary he was ! Suddenly strong arms grasped him, and he knew no more.

Wulf opened his eyes to see the sunlight streaming in through the open flap of a tent. How stiff he was, and how weak ! Then, as he uttered an exclamation of annoyance, a shadow darkened the opening, and Sir Richard entered.

"Good, lad !" he cried. "I am right glad to see you awake again. Three days you have lain as one dead, and more than once I thought I had lost my squire. You lost much blood, Wulf, but there is nothing from which youth and a healthy body will not soon recover.—Yes, we escaped out of the mountains, and by our aid Santarem has been relieved.—Tush, lad ! You've had enough of fighting to last you awhile, and have already gained more glory and honour than many men win in a lifetime. Sleep, lad, sleep and grow strong, if you would strike a blow at Saladin and his men."

CHAPTER IV.

THE SACK OF MESSINA.

It was a morning of glorious sunshine when the English fleet reached Marseilles, to find that King Richard had arrived before them, and, weary of waiting, had chartered several great ships, and had sailed for Messina two weeks before. Accordingly, after a short delay the fleet left Marseilles and steered south, hoping to overtake the King.

During the voyage Sir Richard talked often to Wulf, now fully recovered, and from him the young Saxon learned much he had not known before.

“ You should know, lad,” said Sir Richard one day, “ that King William of Sicily, who died last March, was married to Joan, sister to our King, and that before his death King William appointed as successor to his throne his father’s sister, Constance. But Constance is in Germany, married to the Emperor’s son, and accordingly a cousin, named Tancred, has seized the throne, and now holds Joan prisoner because she favours Constance. Now, King Richard will surely demand his sister’s release, and I fear we may have trouble with Tancred and his subjects.” True words, as they were to prove !

The King did not come on board the fleet until September 22nd, and the next day the great armada entered Messina harbour. The ships made an imposing sight as they sailed in. On the prow of the foremost vessel stood Richard, clad in his royal robes. Every

ship was decked with pennons and streamers. Knights and squires in gleaming mail lined the bulwarks, whilst hundreds of horns and trumpets blared martial music.

Great was the excitement amongst the native population, and the Crusaders who had already arrived, at this imposing display. Philip of France, who had reached Messina some days before, waited upon the shore to welcome Richard; and after the Kings had greeted each other, horses were led forward, and Richard and his nobles rode away to the palace outside the city, which had been prepared for the King's reception.

It soon became plain, however, that the Sicilian population regarded the English with anything but goodwill. Those who had reached Messina before the King, had been refused entry into the city, and had been compelled to camp on the seashore for want of better quarters.

Nor did King Richard's arrival mend matters. In answer to his request that Tancred should release his sister, return her dowry, and supply him with provisions and ships, Tancred sent Queen Joan, but disregarded his other demands. Provisions soon became scarce in the English camp. The Sicilians refused to sell food to the English Crusaders; they insulted them, and even attacked and killed them, when the opportunity arose. To make matters worse, there was little unity between the Kings, and Philip, who should have been Richard's firmest ally, seemed more anxious to be friends with the Sicilians than with the English.

Affairs were in this disturbed state, when Wulf went

one afternoon to fetch a sword which his master had ordered from a German armourer in Messina. The sword was not quite ready, so Wulf seated himself to wait until the armourer had finished his task. It was simply a matter of putting a final edge on the gleaming blade ; that done, Wulf slung the long weapon across his shoulders, and started back to the camp.

By this time dusk was falling and Wulf hastened his steps ; for to be caught in those winding and narrow streets after dark meant a blow on the head from some dark doorway, or a knife thrust in the back.

Wulf therefore hurried along, keeping a sharp lookout, and one hand on his sword ready to withstand any sudden attack. In this way Wulf had covered about half the distance to the gate, when, from a side street, there arose a sudden uproar, and a youth came running towards him, pursued by a howling mob waving knives, bludgeons, and axes, and plainly bent on mischief. Blood was dripping from the fugitive's left arm ; and in the gathering darkness he was running blindly past, when Wulf gripped his uninjured arm, and with a " This way, friend ! " led him down a narrow lane, hoping to throw the pursuers off the trail.

In vain ! The mob saw them enter the lane, and came pouring after them until the Englishmen had difficulty in keeping ahead. Once two men tried to bar the way ; but Wulf's sword leapt from its scabbard, and, as they sprang forward, he met them with the point, so that one went down shrieking, whilst the other turned and fled.

On ran the fugitives, twisting and turning, and ever the ravening mob drew nearer, as Wulf's companion, weakened by loss of blood, ran slower, and yet slower.

"Leave me, and save yourself, brave sir," he gasped at last; but Wulf only laughed, and, supporting the stumbling figure, urged him forward. Valiantly the wounded man responded, and, turning down a narrow alley between tall dark stone houses, they found themselves for a moment alone.

"Courage! We shall yet win free," cried Wulf; then, seeing that his companion had reached the end of his strength, he flung the limp form across his shoulder, and set off at a sturdy trot. But hardly had he started when a howling rabble appeared in the lane ahead, whilst at the same moment the mob in his rear entered the alley, cutting off all retreat.

A blood-curdling yell told Wulf that he had been discovered, and, thus hemmed in, and with no hope of escape, he looked round for some place where he might at least sell his life dearly. A short way off, a deeply recessed doorway showed a darker shadow in the gloom, and, springing towards it, Wulf laid his burden down against the door. Then, drawing Sir Richard's long sword, he faced his enemies.

They came at him like a pack of wolves; but when two of their number had been struck down, they drew back, each urging his fellows to attack. At last a great fellow, bare to the waist and swinging a huge axe, sprang forward and aimed a mighty blow at Wulf's head. Had that blow gone home, Wulf would never have fought



‘Drawing Sir Richard’s long sword, he faced his enemies.’—Page 40.

again. But, stepping lightly aside, he allowed the heavy blade to bury itself deep in the oaken door; then, ere the man could wrench his weapon free, Wulf's sword had passed through his body.

Seeing their champion fall, the mob launched itself forward with sudden fury, and for some moments Wulf had difficulty to defend himself. It was desperate work fighting in that dark, narrow alley. Once a spear passed between Wulf's arm and side; once a thrown knife struck his helmet; and then he heard the door behind him open, and was conscious that the wounded man at his feet had been dragged within. At the same moment a girl's musical voice whispered, "Enter!" Seizing his opportunity, when for an instant the rabble paused in their attack, Wulf sprang backwards through the dark portal, and, slamming the door to, helped the girl to shoot the great bolts, and fix the heavy bars.

"Let them knock," cried the girl, as the baffled mob thundered on the stout door. "Step back, sir, I pray you," she added, and Wulf saw the girl pull upon an iron lever. Instantly an immense block of stone slid out from the wall, completely closing the passage, and blocking all entrance from the world without.

Seeing the amazement in his face, the girl laughed. "'Tis one of Father's inventions," she explained. "He spends his time inventing things." Then, taking an oil lamp, she held it to the face of the wounded man.

"Hasten!" she cried anxiously. "Lift him, and follow me. He has bled much, and I must bind his wound."

Wulf lifted the unconscious man, and followed the girl down a long passage into a great square chamber. Never in his wildest dreams had Wulf imagined such a room! All around, on shelves, on tables, or standing upon the tiled floor, were scores of extraordinary looking objects. Some were a maze of wheels and metal rods; others were made of a transparent, crystal-like substance. Some were so heavy that six strong men could not have lifted them; others so small that they could have lain in the palm of Wulf's hand. From the ceiling hung numbers of stuffed animals, so lifelike that Wulf, who had never seen the like before, laid his hand upon his sword, thinking for a moment that they were alive. Richly coloured hangings draped the walls, whilst, in place of windows, handsomely chased lamps of gold shed a soft light over the room.

Wulf laid his unconscious burden upon a couch, and then crossed himself, observing which the girl laughed bitterly. "You needn't do that," she said. "Father is not a magician, though the ignorant boors outside would think he was, could they see this room." Then, kneeling down beside the couch, she began to bathe and bind the slashed arm.

Watching the girl as she bent over the wounded man, Wulf guessed she was about his own age. She was very beautiful, thought Wulf, with her clear olive skin, radiant colour, and dark eyes and hair, though not so beautiful as Isabel; and he had just come to that conclusion, when a second door opened, and a tall, bearded man entered the room. The newcomer was clad in a

robe of crimson velvet. His hair was dark as the girl's, his eyes as bright, and Wulf guessed he was the girl's father, and the inventor of all those strange things.

"What is this, Tessa?"

"The mob's work again, Father. These two Englishmen were attacked outside the house, and this tall one," nodding at Wulf, "laid his wounded friend on our doorstep, and stood over him. So I opened the door, and, whilst the rabble held off for a moment, let these strangers in. This one is sorely wounded, and has almost bled to death, but I have stanchd his wound, and think he will live."

"You are welcome, young sir," said the girl's father, speaking in French. "I am a Florentine, by name Rinaldo, and I have but now returned from listening to the turmoil without. From the tumult it would seem that the whole city has risen against your countrymen."

"Then I must away, kind sir," cried Wulf. "If there is fighting, my place is at my Lord's side, so I pray you show me how I may leave your house."

"You would go to your death, my friend," replied the elder man, "and I like not to think of a man of gentle birth at the mercy of such a rabble." Then, after a moment's thought, he continued, "Your friend must stay here until he is well, and Tessa shall nurse him. As for you, if go you must, I know a way. This house is built against the city wall. I will lower you from an upper window, and once on firm earth 'tis but a mile to the English camp."

Wulf thanked his new friends for all their kind-

ness, and then, having promised to return another day, followed Messer* Rinaldo out of the room, and up long flights of winding stairs. Presently they came to a narrow window set in a thick wall, and, having fetched a long coil of rope, Messer Rinaldo tied one end to an iron staple, and dropped the other into the darkness without.

"'Tis a long descent, young sir," he said, "but the rope is knotted, so you will not find it difficult. When you reach the ground, jerk the rope three times, and I will pull it up. Now farewell, and may the saints guard you! Your friend is in good hands, and whenever you care to honour this house with a visit, you will be welcome."

Thanking his host again, Wulf grasped the rope, and in a short time reached the ground. Then, having given the required signal, and seen the rope disappear into the darkness, he turned, and at a brisk pace set off for the English camp.

He found the camp in a turmoil, and, on reaching the tent of Sir Richard de Camville, was greeted by that knight with joy.

"Lad," he exclaimed, "I am right glad to see you! When you returned not, I began to fear for your safety. Tell me what has befallen you."

Briefly Wulf related his adventures. "Truly a miraculous escape, lad!" commented the knight, when Wulf had finished. "The Sicilians have risen against the English, killing some, and turning the rest out of the city. The King has had much ado to keep the army

* An Italian title of courtesy, equivalent to "Master" or "Mister."

from storming Messina this night, and I know not what the morrow will bring forth."

The next morning found English and Sicilians ready to fly at one another's throats, and only held back by their leaders.

"I fear we shall come to blows," said Sir Richard to Wulf as they breakfasted. Even as he spoke, a messenger spurred past towards the royal pavilion, and soon it became known throughout the camp that the Sicilians had broken out again, and were attacking the quarters of Hugh the Brown, one of the King's Aquitanian followers.

"Ride towards the town, Wulf, and bring me news of what is happening there," said Sir Richard, when he heard the tidings.

Accordingly, Wulf mounted his horse and galloped towards the main gate, which he found fast shut; so he rode along under the walls. The battlements were bristling with men; and as he passed, insulting cries greeted him, whilst more than once javelins and stones hurtled past his head. At last he came to the hill at the back of the town, and, seeing that the summit was held by a large body of armed men, Wulf turned his horse, and galloped back to the camp.

In the camp tumult reigned. Everywhere men were arming themselves; and as Wulf passed the King's tent, Richard himself came forth fully armed, and accompanied by Sir Richard de Camville.

"Ah! there he is," cried the King. "What news, lad?"

Reining in his horse, Wulf briefly related what he had seen.

“By Saint George !” thundered the King, when Wulf had finished. “I will teach these Sicilians a lesson, and then mayhap we shall be better friends. Sir Richard, to you I entrust the attack on the main gate. My Lords,” he continued, to a number of barons who had gathered round, “collect your men and assault the walls, whilst I relieve Hugh, and then drive the enemy from the heights behind the town. But the other day I noted a postern in the near-by wall. With Heaven’s aid I will this day enter Messina by that gate.”

“My Liege,” said Wulf, as the barons hastened away, “if ’tis your intention to scale the heights behind the town, I know a path leading to the summit which may suit your purpose.”

“Good, lad !” cried the King. “Sir Richard, I will borrow your squire for an hour. Now, lad, gather a score of men, ’tis all we need. The greater the number, the less the glory.”

The little force was soon spurring towards the quarters of Hugh the Brown, but, without waiting for their approach, the cowardly Sicilians turned and fled.

Meanwhile the assault on the walls had already begun, and from the distance came the shouts of the combatants, and the clash of weapons.

“They have a tough nut to crack, Wulf,” cried the King, as they galloped towards the heights. “Methinks we shall have to open the gates for them. Hasten, lad ! Where is this path you spoke of ?”

"'Tis here, Sire," cried Wulf, springing off his horse at the foot of a narrow track which led up the side of an extremely steep hill.

One glance the King cast at the precipitous path ; then, leaving his horse, he started climbing on foot, followed closely by Wulf and the rest of the little band.

Every moment Wulf expected the Sicilians to detect them ; but apparently that face of the hill was considered unscalable, for no guard was kept upon the path, and the English reached the summit unseen. There, hardly waiting for his followers, Richard attacked the troops occupying the height, and so impetuous was his onset that the Sicilians, despite their superior numbers, broke and fled like sheep before a wolf.

"There is little glory to be gained from routing such rabble," cried Richard, checking the pursuit, and hastening towards a small door set in the city wall. The door was locked ; but a few blows from a heavy axe burst it open, and, rushing through, the English encountered a party of Sicilians, who, attracted by the uproar, had been hastening towards the postern.

The surprise was complete, and in a compact body the English charged through the narrow streets towards the main gate. Parties of Sicilians tried to stop them, but they were no match for the English, led by the greatest warrior of the age. Once indeed, in a sharp fray, Richard slipped on a damp stone, but as the axe raised to smite him fell, Wulf caught the blow on his shield, and passed his sword through the Sicilian's body.

"Bravely done, Wulf !" cried the King, springing up again. "I am in your debt, lad."

The main gate, was now in sight. Forcing their way foot by foot through the press of their foes, Richard and his men reached the gateway, and then, flinging open the great doors, admitted their friends, who all this time had been vainly trying to storm the walls.

With the capture of the gate resistance came to an end. Swarming through in their thousands, the Crusaders rushed down the narrow streets, and, despite the King's commands, the common soldiers began to plunder the city, breaking into the houses, and coming forth laden with anything of value they could find. For hours the sack continued ; and it was not until dusk was falling that the King was at last able to restrain his followers, and quietness settled down upon the unfortunate city.

"A notable victory, lad !" said Sir Richard to Wulf that night. "'Tis no mean feat for an army to take a walled town in five hours, and that, too, when allies, who should have helped them, rested quiet and secure as did Philip and his Frenchmen. I doubt not the Sicilians will like us better now we have shown our fangs ; 'tis ever the way to admire the strong and despise the weak. Lad, the King is well pleased with you. Continue as you have begun, and you will be wearing the golden spurs ere you are much older."

CHAPTER V.

TO THE RESCUE.

After the taking of Messina relations gradually improved between the Sicilians and the English.^a Finding that Richard the Lion-Heart was not a man to be trifled with, King Tancred at length made proposals for an alliance. To this Richard agreed, and, to prove his good intentions, compelled his followers to return the plunder they had taken from the townsfolk, compensating them for the loss by costly gifts from his treasury.

These events had occupied so much time that when at last peace was established, it was too late in the year to sail for the Holy Land, and the Crusaders found themselves compelled by contrary winds and weather to remain in Sicily until the following spring.

Wulf spent most of his spare time at the house of Messer Rinaldo. The youth he had saved proved to be a squire of England, named Roger Dalton, and, as the invalid recovered under Tessa's skilful nursing, a strong friendship grew up between the two young men.

"I fear I was the cause of the riot," said Roger one day, in reply to some question of Tessa's. "I had entered the city to buy food, and was bargaining with a woman over the price of bread, when a man accused me of robbing her. He was a low fellow, so I merely felled him with my fist. Thereupon there was a great outcry. One man drew his knife, and ere I could run him through, slashed my arm. Then, finding that if I

stayed I should assuredly be killed, I ingloriously took to my heels. The rest you know. But for you, Wulf, I should most certainly have been killed."

Often the young men talked of England, Wulf telling his hearers about the great forest of the Weald, whilst Roger spoke of the bleak Yorkshire moorlands amidst which lay his home. Sometimes Tessa sang to them, accompanying herself on a harp, and on rare occasions Messer Rinaldo would show them some of the marvels of the wonderful room in which they had first made his acquaintance.

"'Tis my misfortune that I have lived some centuries too soon," he once said bitterly. "When I die, all these things will be destroyed, and it will remain for some other man, hundreds of years hence perhaps, to do over again what I have done, and to gain the credit which should have been mine."

Once he spoke to them of their mission. "Yours is a noble cause," he said, "but I fear you will not succeed. 'Tis bad for an army to have two leaders, and leaders so different as your King Richard and King Philip of France. Though now they seem friends, there can never be real friendship or trust between them. King Richard is a soldier, open and honest, one who prefers the clean blow given in fair fight to the secret schemes of the council chamber. King Philip, on the other hand, has naught soldierly in him, but is a jealous, treacherous schemer, as I fear your King will discover ere long."

Thus the winter passed away, and even when Roger had returned to his duties as squire to a northern knight,

named Sir Thomas Norton, the two friends were constant visitors at the inventor's house.

At length it became known that Richard waited only for the arrival of the Princess Berengaria of Navarre, whom Queen Eleanor, his mother, was bringing to be his bride. March came, and on the last day of the month Philip and the French departed for Palestine, and ten days later, the royal bride having arrived, Richard followed in their wake.

The English fleet made an imposing spectacle, as it started on its long voyage. Three huge transports, or "dromonds" as they were called, led the way, and in one of them sailed Richard's sister, Queen Joan, and the Princess Berengaria. Then in seven squadrons followed over two hundred tall ships, Richard himself sailing in a great galley at the head of fifty other war-vessels.

Wulf and Roger had taken affectionate farewell of Messer Rinaldo and Tessa, promising to visit them on their return, and then had followed their respective masters. Sir Richard de Camville had been given command of a war-galley, and for two days the mighty fleet kept together—following the King's ship, as sheep follow a shepherd—guided in the daytime by the royal standard, at night by a great light set in the stern of the King's galley.

"The ship-master tells me that a storm threatens," said Sir Richard to Wulf, as they leaned against the bulwarks, watching a great bank of clouds coming up behind them. "'Tis ill luck, for I know not how the fleet will keep together in a tempest."

It was the second day out. Within an hour the sky was covered with black clouds, and a heavy gale was lashing the sea into great waves, and causing the long vessel to pitch alarmingly.

Whilst daylight lasted, it was possible to keep the King's ship in sight ; but with night the storm increased, and the murky darkness, filled with flying spray, hid everything, whilst the shrieking wind drowned all sounds. Sometimes, indeed, a flickering light glowed suddenly in the blackness, as some storm-tossed craft larched perilously near them, soon to be lost again in the flying scud. Now and then, as the wind lulled, the creaking of straining ropes on some unseen vessel might be heard ; and once, close at hand, an appalling crash rose above the storm, followed by cries for help which were lost immediately in the howling wind. Thereafter they heard nothing but the roar of the tempest, and when morning broke, grey and chill, the galley was driving alone before the wind upon a lonely sea.

" 'Tis as I feared," said Sir Richard, gloomily scanning the heaving wastes. " We have lost the fleet, and now, according to the ship-master, must go whither the wind blows us."

Nine days the gale lasted, whilst the galley ran before the wind, and those on board saw neither land nor sail. On the ninth day the gale dropped to a faint breeze, and the ship-master stating his opinion that they were somewhere south-west of Cyprus, Sir Richard bade him steer for the island.

But day followed day, and the sea-weary eyes of

the Crusaders, saw no sign of land, and it was not until full eight days after the storm had ceased that a faint, blue outline appeared ahead.

"Behold Cyprus, Sir Richard!" cried the ship-master. "Methinks, sir, we are not the first arrivals. See yonder ships standing towards us! To me the tall vessel leading the way is wondrous like the great dromond which carried Queen Joan and the Princess of Navarre."

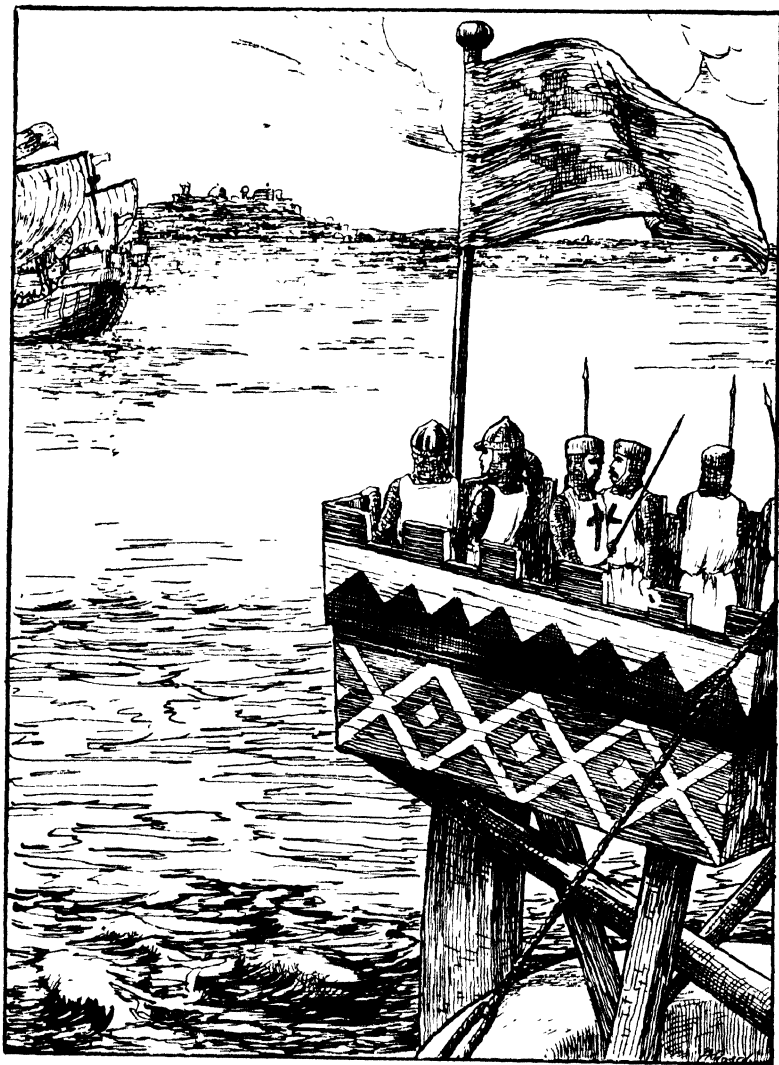
"Indeed, I believe you are right," answered Sir Richard. "What say you, Wulf? Is yon ship the barque which carries the King's bride?"

"'Tis the same, sir," answered Wulf, shading his eyes. "I can see the royal banner flying."

In another hour the ships had drawn abreast, and Sir Richard, accompanied by Wulf, boarded the great dromond. There were many knights and squires on board the ship, and scarcely had Wulf reached the deck when a hand fell upon his shoulder, and a cheery voice exclaimed, "Well met, Wulf of Hawkhurst!"

"Why, 'tis William du Bois," cried Wulf, recognizing a squire with whom he had made friends in France. "What news, William?"

"News, lad?" cried the other. "'Tis a sorry tale. This ship—having the royal ladies on board—with certain other vessels became separated from the fleet during the storm, and, arriving at Limasol, the town yonder, some five days ago, sought shelter in the harbour. But a storm arose, dashing two of the ships against the rocks, and but for Heaven's mercy we should have shared their fate."



"What say you, Wulf? Is yon ship the barque which carries the King's bride?"—*Page 54.*

"But why are you not in harbour now?" asked Wulf.

"Because the Greeks, or Cypriots as they call themselves, urged on no doubt by their King, Isaac Comnenos, who, report says, is in league with Saladin, show a hostile disposition, and we dare not risk Queen Joan and the Princess of Navarre falling into their hands, lest Isaac hold them as hostages against the King. As it is, the Cypriots refuse us food, and have imprisoned the men saved from the wrecks in a tower near the shore, and will not release them."

"This is shameful!" cried Wulf. "Has naught been done to rescue them?"

"Tush, lad!" cried William. "You are too hot-headed. How could we free them?" And several squires near by seemed inclined to resent the slur implied by Wulf's words.

"How? You say these men are imprisoned near the shore. Then surely it should be easy —"

"The fellow's a braggart," said a voice behind Wulf; and, turning round, Wulf found himself looking into the face of Fulk Fitz Aymon.

"Ha! So we meet again, Fitz Aymon. I was wondering when our paths would cross. A braggart, am I? Harken, all! I made no boast, but I accept the challenge. I'll wager my horse against this man's steed that the prisoners shall be free ere four days have passed, and if I succeed, Fitz Aymon, you shall take back those words."

"'Twas a rash wager, lad," said Sir Richard later.

"Yet, having been challenged, I see not how you could have refused. How do you think to make good your words?"

"I know not," answered Wulf. "To-morrow I will take a boat, and examine this tower. Perchance a way will suggest itself."

The tower, as Wulf discovered, was a small fort standing close to the shore. There seemed to be no special guard set, but a body of armed Cypriots stationed between the tower and the shore cut off escape that way. For some time Wulf sat in the boat, studying the scene, and making all sorts of plans to rescue his countrymen; then, as a Cypriot galley showed signs of coming to see what he was about, he ordered the sailors to row back to the ship.

It was near midnight when the boat again left the English galley, and, with muffled oars, proceeded towards a point of land which Wulf had noticed in the morning. There Wulf sprang ashore, and, lifting a long bundle, disappeared into the night.

Wearing a dark cloak which enveloped him from head to foot, Wulf crept stealthily forward, and so well had he studied the surroundings of the tower during the morning's survey, that, though the night was very dark, he reached his destination without mishap.

Standing motionless against the rough wall of the fort, Wulf listened intently, and then began cautiously to circle the tower. In five minutes he was back where he had started. Apparently the Cypriots were so certain of their prisoners that they set no guard. Assured

of this, Wulf began to hum a song popular in the English camp. There was nothing to show in which part of the tower the prisoners were kept. No light showed, no sound came from any of the barred windows, and, having finished the song, Wulf moved some way round the tower, and began to hum it again.

A second time he finished the song without result, but the third time, ere he was half way through, a voice from above asked in English, "Who goes?"

"A friend!" answered Wulf, peering up at the wall above, in which he thought he saw the darker patch of a narrow window with something lighter showing, which might have been a man's face. "A friend to aid you!"

A short whispered conversation followed; and then, having thrown the end of a thin rope up towards the black patch, and felt it caught and held, Wulf tied the contents of his bundle to the rope, and saw them hauled up into the darkness above.

The next day Wulf enlisted the aid of William du Bois and several other squires and men-at-arms; and as soon as it was dark enough to cover their movements, the little force crowded into the boats of the fleet, and rowed into the harbour.

"I trust it comes to a fray," whispered William in Wulf's ear.

"You'll get your fray, old fighter," whispered Wulf back. "There are a hundred Cypriots encamped between the tower and the shore to guard against a landing."

William du Bois laughed silently. "They will be

a surprised guard ere long. What did you take our friends in the tower? Swords?"

"Aye, swords. Naked swords, a file to cut their prison bars, and rope to escape by. Now speak no more, William. Water carries sound, and to be heard would frustrate all."

One hour lengthened into two, two into three, and midnight came and went; and the waiting men were tiring of their vigil, when suddenly a single cry rent the stillness of the night, followed by the clash of arms.

At the sounds the boats shot forward, and as they touched the land, the English sprang out, waded ashore, and then rushed towards the scene of battle. But others had also heard the sounds and taken alarm, and suddenly a great tongue of flame shot upwards, its ruddy glare falling upon a confused mass of men furiously fighting, a short distance ahead.

With a fierce shout the English flung themselves upon the Cypriots, who, surprised at this fresh attack, turned and fled, so that in a few moments rescuers and rescued had clasped hands. But already the enemy had recovered from the surprise, and, reinforced, they now placed themselves between the English and the shore, intent to bar their retreat until help arrived from the town.

There was not a moment to be lost. Having marshalled his men in a solid body, with the rescued prisoners in the centre, Wulf gave the order to charge, and with a shout the English rushed upon their enemies. The Cypriots already outnumbered the English three to

one, but they were no match for the northerners ; and, cleaving a way right through them, the English began to scramble into the boats, whilst Wulf, with a select body of fighting men, held the enemy at bay.

It was desperate work in the ruddy half-light cast by the burning beacon. Shoulder to shoulder the English fought, until at last, when all the others were on board, the little band suddenly turned, and rushed for the boats.

After them came the enemy, but the slight start gave the English just time to scramble on board, and as the boldest of the Cypriots rushed after them into the water, the English sailors bent to their oars, and sent the light craft skimming out of danger.

An hour later, rescued and rescuers were back on board the English ships ; and the next day, in the presence of all who had heard the challenge, Fulk Fitz Aymon sullenly apologized to Wulf, and made over to him his horse, a magnificent roan charger.

Later, Sir Richard spoke to Wulf. “ You did well last night, lad, and have proved yourself a leader. But, Wulf, I know your story ; and if you have gained honour by last night’s deed, you have also gained a deadly foe. Fulk Fitz Aymon hates you, and will do all he can to work you ill ; nor, if I read his face aright, will his be the open enmity of a chivalrous foe. So watch him, lad ! He is a snake that will strike in the dark.”

CHAPTER VI.

THE CAPTURE OF CYPRUS.

After the rescue of the prisoners King Isaac came to Limasol, and, apologizing for his subjects' behaviour, courteously invited the royal ladies to land, promising them his protection. But they were loath to put themselves in his power; for, in spite of his protestations of friendship, the Cypriots continued to muster upon the shore in ever increasing numbers.

Thus passed three days in fruitless negotiations, and by that time the Cypriots had assumed such a menacing attitude that the English feared King Isaac would attempt to take the royal ladies by force, if they continued to refuse his hospitality. Accordingly, on Sunday, May 5th, Queen Joan, choosing the lesser of two evils, sent a message ashore, saying that she and the Princess of Navarre would land the next day.

"I trust we have done right," said Sir Richard to Wulf that same evening. "We are not strong enough to defy these Cypriots, and to put to sea again until the King comes would be madness. Come Richard must; for Cyprus, which once supplied the Christians in Palestine with food, has yielded nothing since Isaac became King and secretly allied himself with Saladin. 'Tis a friendship which Richard must break; for the food of Cyprus we must have, if the Christian army is not to starve. At least so I reason, I who am but a plain soldier."

“ Indeed, sir, I think you are right,” answered Wulf. “ But look yonder, Sir Richard ! See you anything on the horizon—there—’neath that cloud lit by the setting sun ? ”

The knight shaded his eyes. “ Birds, Wulf, and yet ——— By the Cross ! lad, ’tis the fleet. Richard comes at last.”

It was indeed the main English fleet, which, having visited Crete and Rhodes, had sailed thence to Cyprus ; and great was the King’s joy, when, on entering the harbour the next morning, he found so many of his missing vessels safe and sound. But his joy turned to anger, when he heard of the churlish treatment the royal ladies and his people had received from the islanders, and he immediately sent a herald ashore, commanding Isaac to make amends.

King Isaac, however, was in no mood to make amends. He had gathered around him all the armed forces of the island, and, thinking himself strong enough now to defy the English, he returned an insulting answer to Richard’s message. Thereupon the English King hesitated no longer, but ordered his trumpeters to sound, “ To arms ! ”

It was no light task which lay before the English knights and men-at-arms. Five armed galleys lay between the fleet and the shore. At the water’s edge a stout barricade had been erected, behind which was stationed the Cypriot army, whilst farther inland lay the strongly fortified town, overlooked by a large castle built upon a rock.

And now throughout the fleet the trumpets blared ; and the Crusaders, weary though they were with a long voyage, armed themselves eagerly, and, crowding into the small boats, rowed towards the shore. Meanwhile the archers opened the fray by shooting at the Cypriot galleys, and so deadly was their aim that the crews leapt panic-stricken into the sea, leaving their ships to be captured by the English.

Whilst this was going on, the boats had neared the shore, whence they were greeted by storms of arrows which caused considerable loss amongst the closely packed soldiers. Thereupon, seeing that delay was perilous, the King leapt overboard into the water, and, calling his men to follow, rushed to the assault of the barricade.

The Cypriots fought gallantly ; but they were no match for the English men-at-arms. Soon the barricade was breached in a dozen places, and, pouring through, the Crusaders drove the defenders before them. The rout was complete. King Isaac with numbers of his followers fled towards the open country. Others sought refuge in Limasol, but even there they could not escape ; and, deserted by their King, and finding resistance hopeless, the garrison surrendered the town to the English. That afternoon the royal ladies were brought ashore, and housed in the castle, where the King also took up his residence with Sir Richard de Camville and several more of his leading men.

Afternoon was turning into evening, when Sir Richard called Wulf to him, and dispatched the squire

to the town below with certain orders to the under-officer who commanded his men-at-arms. This officer was the same Thibaut who had given Wulf his first lessons in arms. Having found the men quartered in a large, barn-like building, Wulf delivered his message, and then sat chatting with the grizzled soldier, between whom and the young squire there existed a strong friendship.

"I mistrust these Cypriots," said Thibaut, draining a huge tankard of wine at one draught.

"But they make good wine, Thibaut," laughed a young archer, who had watched the feat with admiration.

"Lad, you talk too much," rejoined Thibaut, 'with a frown—"though I'll grant you the wine is well enough. But, speaking of mistrust, young sir," he continued to Wulf, "'twas old Simon who put the thought into my head. Simon was once a monk, and still remembers something of Latin and Greek. Now he says that on his way back here this evening he paused to rest against a garden wall, and as he rested two men started speaking on the other side. They spoke in Greek, but some words he understood, and he heard one say, 'The lioness is caged in the great tower.' Then he missed some words, and the next he heard were, 'It opens into the room of the angels—to-night—a hostage.' That is all, young sir. I gave it little thought, for Simon had already drunk much wine, and yet the words breed mistrust."

Soon afterwards Wulf took his leave to return to the castle, and he had reached the castle gate when he heard a voice hail him from behind. Turning, he saw Roger Dalton running after him.

"What ails you, man?" laughed Roger. "I've been calling you and trying to overtake you for the last five minutes, but you walked so fast, and were so deep in thought, that all my efforts were vain."

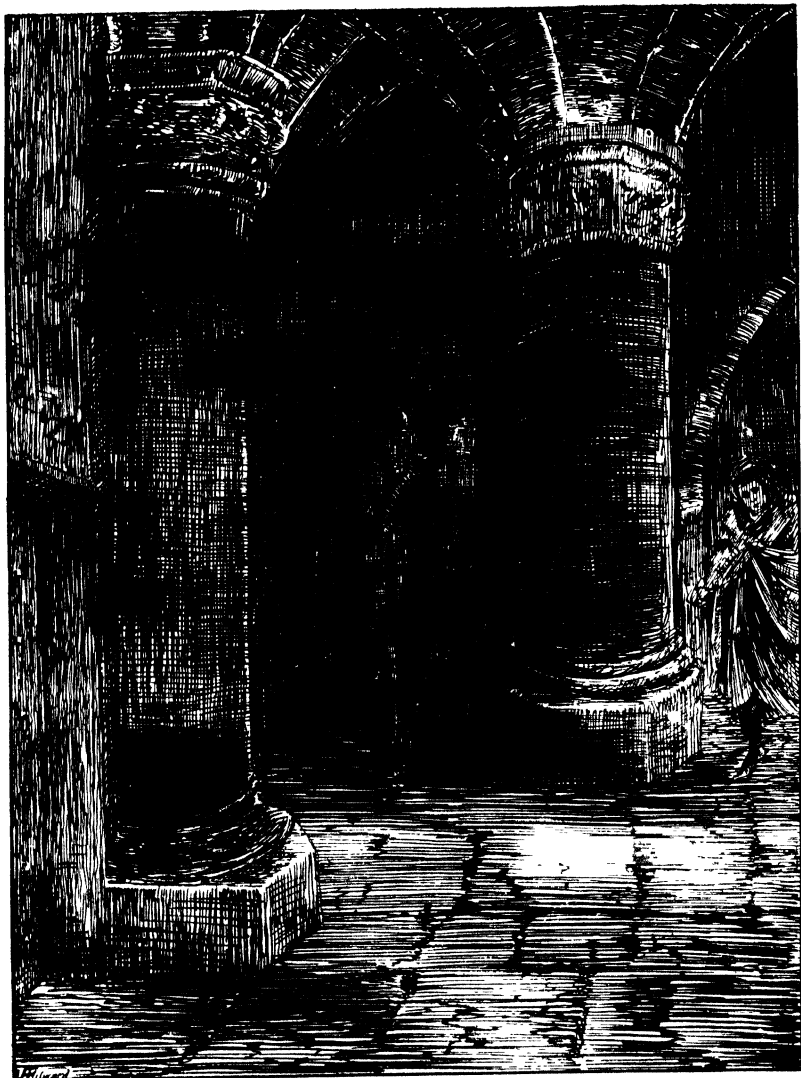
Wulf greeted his friend warmly, and then went on to tell him of the words Simon had overheard, and the vague fears they aroused in his mind.

"Room of the angels!" repeated Roger. "That smacks of the chapel, Wulf. Let us go and see if there is such a room."

It was dark by this time, and the two friends lighted tapers ere they made their way to the deserted chapel. It looked cold and eerie in the dim light, full of monstrous shadows, and the two squires searched quickly, anxious to complete their task. The chapel was a small place. Except a narrow spiral staircase leading up to a fast-locked door, there was nothing to attract attention; and they were turning away, when Wulf saw a low door half concealed by a stone pillar. A key was in the lock, and, opening the door, the friends entered a small room, bare of all furniture, and without windows. It was the roof, however, which attracted their eyes, for there, carved in the solid stone, was a *great host of angels*.

"'Tis the place," began Roger, when Wulf silenced him with a gesture; the next moment they had extinguished their tapers, and stood listening to the sound of stealthy footsteps coming towards them across the chapel. Evidently someone else was interested in the room of the angels.

Hardly daring to breathe, the two friends heard the



‘They stood listening to the sound of stealthy footsteps coming towards them.’—Page 65.

unknown pause outside the room ; then came a click, followed by a faint scraping, and the sound of receding footsteps. At the same moment Wulf sprang silently forward, and grasped the door-handle. The door would not move. The unknown had locked them in.

For some moments they were too surprised to do anything ; then they flung themselves against the door in an effort to burst it open. But the door was of stout timber ; and, realizing the uselessness of attempting to batter it down, the friends soon desisted, and started to search round the room, hoping to find some other outlet.

"Let's shout," suggested Roger, when, at the end of ten minutes' search in complete darkness, they were as far from escaping as ever.

"And let the man who locked the door know we are in here," replied Wulf. "Roger, there is treachery afoot, and we must keep our knowledge secret, if we are to baffle the unknown traitor ; for methinks it was a traitor who turned the key. No Cypriot would be allowed in the castle. Let us try the door again."

The door was still locked ; but as they were turning away, Wulf's foot struck something on the floor, and, bending down, he picked up a key.

"But why lock us in, and then push the key under the door ?" asked Roger.

"Whoever locked the door did not know we were inside," explained Wulf. "He locked the door to keep others out, not us in, and then pushed the key underneath so that those who come presently can open the

door. There is some other way into this room, Roger. Now let us go."

Having locked the door behind them, and pushed the key back again, the two friends hastened back to the inhabited part of the castle, deciding, as they hurried along, to keep the matter to themselves. Accordingly, as soon as the King and his knights had retired to rest, the squires donned light mail, armed themselves with swords and daggers, and then stole through the passages of the sleeping castle towards the chapel.

No sound broke the silence of the chapel, and, having assured himself that the place was empty, and that the door of the room of the angels was still locked, Wulf was returning to where Roger waited by the entrance, when he saw a dark object lying on the stone floor, and, stooping, he picked up a leathern glove.

It was too dark for Wulf to examine his find; so, stuffing it into his pocket, he returned to Roger, and the two took up their posts close to the main door, since anyone wishing to gain the castle must pass that way.

One—two—three hours they waited, and the watchers had difficulty in keeping awake after the fatigues of the day. The chapel was cold, too, and many times weird noises caused the young men to start, thinking the unknown was upon them. Then, just as they were beginning to wonder if, after all, they had not struck upon a "mare's nest," of a sudden there came to them the sound of a key turning in a lock, and of stealthy footsteps which died away almost as soon as they were heard.

Gripping their swords, the watchers waited the approach of the unknown ; but now an utter silence filled the 'chapel, and, listen as they would, they could hear no sound. It was trying work standing in the dark, straining eyes and ears to catch some indication of the enemy. Minute after minute passed, and nothing happened, and then suddenly a piercing scream broke the silence, followed by a rush of feet.

Calling Roger to follow, Wulf sprang towards the room of the angels, and reached the door just as a darker shadow loomed in front of him. The next moment Wulf had passed his sword through the shadow, which proved solid enough, and collapsed with a cry, and then the two young men were standing with their backs to the door, fighting for their lives.

They could not see their assailants. Swords came out of the shadows, and they struck back, nor were their blows harmless, as more than one cry of pain testified. They themselves would have been killed many times, but for their mail. Sword met sword, dagger met dagger, in the darkness. There was no skilful swordplay ; it was cut and thrust, cut and thrust—a riot of whirling steel, amidst which the squires were conscious of one idea, to hold the door behind them till help came.

Now the din had roused the castle, and distant shouts were heard and the sound of running feet. Desperately, knowing that every moment's delay imperilled their lives, the conspirators strove to cut down the two who barred their escape. But the squires' mail saved them. Now a light appeared coming down the spiral

staircase. Forced against the door, Wulf and Roger fought desperately with desperate men. Then the main door burst open, and a crowd of knights and squires bearing swords and torches rushed into the chapel.

The next moment the strangers were gripped by a dozen pairs of hands, and the light showed four swarthy, dark-visaged men, whilst a fifth lay dead upon the floor. A din of excited voices filled the chapel. Each man asked his neighbour what had happened, until suddenly an exclamation from the King, who had entered unobserved, drew all eyes in his direction. "By the Cross! what is the meaning of this?" he cried, as he stooped and lifted a long bundle from the floor, and then, turning aside the folds of a heavy coat, displayed the face of the Princess Berengaria.

"Now, Wulf of Hawkhurst, let's hear your tale," said King Richard, when the Princess had been borne away by her ladies, and the prisoners were safely locked in the castle dungeons.

Briefly Wulf related the events of the evening, beginning with the words Simon had overheard, but saying nothing of the glove he had found.

When he had finished, the King remained silent awhile, and then said, "Wulf Oswald, and you, Roger Dalton, I owe you thanks. 'Tis clear that these men sought to gain possession of the Princess, whose chamber lies at the top of yon spiral stairs, so that she might be a hostage in their power, and be used to stay my hands. Lads, I owe to you more than a bride saved from captivity. You have done a knightly deed this night,

and I will not forget. Meanwhile take these in part recognition of my thanks." Detaching a heavy golden chain from about his neck, he placed it over Wulf's head, whilst to Roger he gave a handsome ring. "Now, lads, away, and get those wounds dressed, for I see you both bear marks of the fray. By the Cross ! it must have been a noble fight in the dark. I would I had been with you !"

The affair made a great stir in the English army, and Wulf and Roger suddenly found themselves famous, so that Sir Richard laughingly said to Wulf one day, "Lad, you will soon be too renowned a squire for a plain knight like me."

"Never, Sir Richard ——" began Wulf.

"Nay, lad, I did but jest. I rejoice to see you rising so fast, and also that your fame has not made you proud. Remember, Wulf, the greatest knight is ever humble where his own deeds are concerned, but generous in his praise of the deeds of others."

Neither Wulf nor Roger had taken serious hurt in the affray, and they were both with the King the following day, when, coming suddenly upon the entire Cypriot army with but fifty riders at his back, he attacked so furiously that the islanders were struck with terror, and thrown into such confusion that they made little or no resistance. King Richard himself captured the Cypriot standard. King Isaac fled to the mountains, and the whole of his army retreated in utter rout, flinging away their arms, and abandoning their camp and a huge spoil to the victors.

Some days after this victory, whilst the King still rested in Limasol, three galleys entered the harbour, having on board Guy of Lusignan, King of Jerusalem, and several of his chief nobles.

King Richard welcomed his guests royally, and entertained them at a great banquet, to which all his knights and barons were invited.

"You seem sad, sir," said Wulf to Sir Richard de Camville, as he helped his master to array himself for the banquet.

"I am, lad," replied the knight. "I am sad because the noble cause upon which we are embarked seems doomed to failure."

"Failure, Sir Richard! But how?"

"Jealousy, Wulf, jealousy and quarrels among the Christian leaders. This Guy is he who lost Jerusalem and the Holy Land, so that now, except for Tyre, Saladin holds the whole country."

"But how came Guy of Lusignan to be King of Jerusalem, Sir Richard?"

"In the right of his wife, Sibylla, elder daughter of King Almeric, who has been dead these eighteen years," replied the knight. "And now that Sibylla has followed her father, Conrad de Montferrat, Lord of Tyre, who has recently married Sibylla's younger sister, Isabel, declares that Guy is no longer King, but that the Crown belongs to him as husband of King Almeric's younger daughter.

"Such is the quarrel between Guy and Conrad, Wulf, and now comes the news that Philip of France has

espoused the cause of Conrad, whilst this day Richard has promised his support to Guy. Thus, ere the liberation of the Holy Land is even begun, are the two Kings ranged against each other."

The banquet that night was but the prelude to the greater occasion of the morrow, when Richard and Berengaria were married, and the Princess crowned Queen. Thereafter followed several days given over to festivity, and then Richard prepared to complete the conquest of Cyprus.

King Isaac, however, had already had one taste of war that was little to his liking, and now he sent a message to the English King, asking for a parley. Accordingly the Kings met, and on Isaac swearing fealty to Richard, and promising to accompany him to the Holy Land with five hundred lances, the kiss of peace was exchanged.

That night the Kings made merry together, and afterwards retired to their tents. It was a close, cloudy night, and, unable to sleep, Wulf rose and wandered through the camp until presently he found himself standing near the royal pavilions. As he stood there thinking of home, of the great forest at that moment clad in fresh summer green, of Isabel whose scarf he wore, and of all the doings and happenings that had filled his boyhood—the sound of measured footfalls fell upon his ears ; and, glancing round, he saw the vague outline of a man on horseback moving slowly through the sleeping camp.

"Strange !" thought Wulf, and moved stealthily forward to intercept the rider. Now the stranger was

lost to sight; now he came into view between two tents, and then, when but a dozen yards separated Wulf from the unknown, the moon shone for a moment through a rift in the clouds, and fell full upon the rider.

With a shout Wulf sprang forward. At the same instant the rider took alarm; and as Wulf clutched at his bridle, he dealt the young squire a heavy blow on the head. Then, setting spurs to his horse, he galloped furiously away.

Wulf's shout had roused the camp, and he was soon surrounded by friends. Recognizing him, these dispatched one of their number for the knight of Camville; and soon Sir Richard came running up, followed by the King, who, hearing the shouts, had rushed from his tent, sword in hand.

"What, Wulf!" he exclaimed. "Lad, you are ever in the wars. How came you in this state?"

"The King of Cyprus!" gasped Wulf. "He has escaped."

"By the Cross!" cried the King, "I noticed that the entrance to his tent was open, as I passed. Nay, sirs, 'tis useless following. No horse in the army could catch the steed Isaac bestrides. Sir Richard, look well to your brave squire; he has had a shrewd buffet."

As it turned out, Wulf's wound was not serious, but it kept him in bed whilst Richard and Guy of Lusignan completed the conquest of Cyprus, and captured King Isaac. This time the Cypriot King was closely guarded, and sent a prisoner to the fortress of Markab in Tripoli.

One day, a fortnight after Wulf had been struck

down, Sir Richard de Camville came and sat down beside his couch.

“Lad,” he said, “you will soon be well, and then we are to part.—Nay, I like not the thought either, but it must be. With Cyprus ours, Richard needs governors who will see that the army in Palestine is kept supplied with food, and he has appointed Robert of Turnham and myself to rule the island. As for yourself, the King likes you well and trusts you, and has placed you on his own retinue.—Tush ! lad, we shall meet again. Only then I trow ’twill be *Sir Wulf Oswald*, and not a squire, whom I shall greet.”

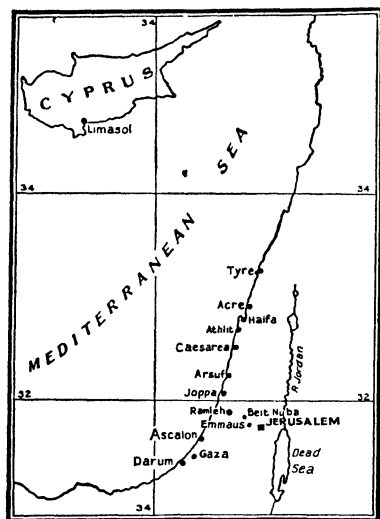
CHAPTER VII.

THE SIEGE OF ACRE.

On June 5th, 1191, the English fleet at last left Cyprus for Acre. That town had been captured by Saladin in July, 1187, and it was not until August, 1189, that King Guy with ten thousand men had undertaken its recapture. For nearly two years the siege had dragged on, the Franks making little progress ; for, whilst *they* besieged Acre, Saladin with a large army occupied the hills behind the town, and in turn besieged the Christian camp. Moreover, besides these enemies, the Christians had to contend against hunger and disease, which daily claimed scores of victims.

Yet there had never been any thought of retreat. If the Holy Land was to be rescued from the infidel, a harbour was necessary where the Christian fleets could

ride secure, and set ashore their supplies for the crusading armies. And throughout the coast of Palestine there was no harbour so safe as that of Acre, no town so suitable for a base from which to start the reconquest of the land. Thus it was that the Christian camp before Acre became the point for which all the crusading armies made. Acre must be recaptured before any other enterprise could be undertaken.



Map of Palestine, illustrating the Third Crusade.

The English galleys took but three days to complete the voyage from Cyprus; and as Wulf stood on the prow of the King's vessel, watching the battlemented walls and towers of Acre take shape before him, his heart was too full for words.

At last they were at the gate of the Holy Land, the goal which for eleven long months they had been striving to reach. Like all true Crusaders, Wulf firmly believed he was doing the will of Heaven in fighting the Saracens. He believed that the greater the number of infidels he killed, the better would God be pleased; and he felt assured that if he died fighting the enemies of his faith, he would go straight to Heaven.

"A noble view, lad!" cried a great voice behind him; and, turning, Wulf beheld the King.

"'Tis so indeed, Sire," he replied.

"Aye, and a land where much honour and glory may be won," went on the King, gazing at the scene before him with kindling eyes. "See yonder hills behind the town! 'Tis there that Saladin hovers with his army. I am told that the Saracens, though they ride lighter than we do, and cannot withstand the charge of our heavily armed chivalry, are right gallant fighters."

"Indeed, Sire, I pray they may prove to be so!" cried Wulf fervently.

"Well said, Wulf! There spoke the true knight of the Cross. Lad, you should reach high. Yet, Wulf, above all things covet honour. 'Tis by our deeds we shall be remembered, not by our riches or our lands, and before us lie deeds in plenty, if I mistake not."

Long after the King had left him, Wulf stood still, deeply stirred by the praise he had received. He *would* covet honour, covet it for Isabel's sake; and then his mind travelled back to the night when he and Roger had fought side by side in the dark chapel, and to the glove he had found. There, at any rate, was a man who did not covet honour. Wulf took the glove from his pocket, and examined it for the hundredth time. It was a plain leathern gauntlet. Some day he would find the traitor.

Now the fleet neared the shore, which was dark with the host of the Crusaders gathered to welcome the great soldier who had come to their aid. It was a clam-

rous welcome. King Philip of France stood upon the shore to greet his noble brother-in-arms, and in the Christian camp that night there was much rejoicing; for all felt that now the great Lion-Heart had come, the long siege would soon end in victory.

Acre at that time was one of the strongest fortresses in the world. On all sides great towers and walls, surrounded by a deep ditch, frowned down upon the besiegers, whilst, to make the task of the Christians still harder, constant watch had to be kept on the landward side of their camp, where barricades and deep trenches had been made to hold off the encircling Saracens.

So far Philip had made no direct attack, contenting himself with setting up his engines of war—great machines which cast ponderous stones against the walls, causing them to shake and crumble under the repeated shocks. But with Richard's arrival the siege took on fresh vigour. Though the slower vessels of his fleet, carrying his war-machines and the greater part of his army, had not yet arrived, Richard threw himself heart and soul into the siege. No task was beneath him. All through the long, hot days, he was here, there, and everywhere—helping, criticizing, instructing, and encouraging his soldiers. Wulf found himself with scarcely an idle moment, for the King kept him constantly employed in bearing messages, and in directing the soldiers at their work.

In those days Wulf learned much of war. He penetrated the dark tunnels of the miners, as they slowly burrowed under the walls of Acre, propping up the earth

above them with stout timbers as they went along. Presently, they told Wulf those wooden supports would be set on fire ; and as they burnt through, the earth above would fall in, and the walls and towers built up above would crack and tumble.

Whilst all this was going on, the Saracens in Acre were not idle. Any Crusader venturing too near the walls was greeted with volleys of arrows ; and one day, as Wulf paused a moment with William du Bois to watch a French stone-caster hurling huge stones against a great tower, something whizzed past his ear, and an iron cross-bow bolt stuck shivering in the woodwork of the great war-machine.

The next moment he was pulled violently to the ground. "Don't move !" urged William in his ear ; and before Wulf could reply, the other had disappeared, to return in a few moments with a crestfallen face.

"Why all this ado, William, over a Saracen bolt ?" laughed Wulf.

"Saracen bolt !" growled the other. "Look at it sticking in yonder wooden beam, and tell me if that bolt came from the walls of Acre ! It came from behind us, Wulf, aimed by one who desires your death. See this ! I failed to catch the villain, but here is something that was his."

Wulf uttered a cry of amazement, for the thing the other held in his hand was a leathern gauntlet, the fellow of the one that Wulf had found on the chapel floor.

"You have an enemy ?" asked William du Bois.

"So it would appear," replied Wulf, musingly ; then

he briefly related the story of the other glove, and the unknown traitor.

"'Tis strange," murmured William, thoughtfully. "He fears you so much that he tries to kill you, and yet what could a glove prove? Wulf, here is more than fear! Here is *hate*, and I can think of but one man who might hate and fear you at the same time. One whose horse you ride, whose ——"

"Fulk Fitz Aymon!" exclaimed Wulf. "Impossible! He may hate me, but he is no traitor."

"Be not so sure. From what you tell me, I judge that he came unwillingly on this Crusade. Certainly his heart is not in the venture, and that he hates you is clear. Does he not go horseless until he can win another steed? Wulf, beware! Methinks in Fulk Fitz Aymon there is a man who would not hesitate to kill his fellow-countryman, or betray his King."

Wulf was much troubled over this adventure, not for any danger to himself, but at the thought that it might be Isabel's brother who was the secret traitor. Yet the more he thought on the matter, the likelier did it seem that Fulk was the man. Suppose the unknown in the chapel had been Fulk? Missing his glove, he would doubtless, sooner or later, return to look for it; and, when unable to find it, whom should he suspect but Wulf, or Roger Dalton, who had foiled the plot? Wulf remembered the enmity that had so long existed between them. Then there was the affair of the horse. Yes! Hate, and fear that somehow the glove might lead to his undoing, were active in Fulk's evil heart. It was like

enough. He must watch. He would hide the two gloves away, and swear Roger and William to secrecy. For Isabel's sake, he must save her brother from his wickedness and folly.

But, in the days that followed, Wulf had little time to think of his own affairs. King Richard was suddenly struck down with a fever; and whilst he lay helpless, King Philip made two unsuccessful assaults on the city. Then Philip fell a victim to the same malady, whilst, to make matters worse, the Kings were still divided on the question of the succession to the throne of Jerusalem. At last, however, seeing that it was foolish to quarrel thus over a kingdom which was yet to be reconquered, the allies agreed to postpone their decision, meanwhile entrusting the royal revenues to the two sacred orders of Knighthood, the Hospitallers and the Templars.

Whilst affairs were in this unsatisfactory condition, the rest of Richard's fleet arrived, bringing the remainder of his army and his engines of war. These were at once set up, and all day the great machines cast their ponderous masses of stone against the walls of Acre, which now began to crumble fast.

It was plain to all that the long siege was drawing to a close, and that nothing could save the city, unless the army of Saladin could storm the Christian camp, and raise the siege.

One day, as Wulf waited beside the King's bed for a message which he was to bear to a distant part of the camp, the clash of arms penetrated faintly into the royal pavilion. With a cry the King tried to raise him-



All day the great machines cast their ponderous masses of stone against the walls of Acre.'—Page 81.

self ; then, finding he was still too weak, he sank back on his couch with an exclamation of rage. "Hasten, Wulf ! " he cried. "Mount and ride, lad, and bring me news of what passes.' A curse on this fever which keeps me here, when there is man's work to be done ! "

Running from the tent, Wulf sprang 'on his horse, and spurred towards the sounds of battle. From all parts of the camp Crusaders were hastening in the same direction, buckling on their mail as they ran. Saladin's army was attacking the camp ; but even as Wulf galloped up to the barricade, the sounds of conflict ceased, and he saw the Saracens drawing off. They had hoped to storm the camp by a surprise attack ; but, having failed, they drew off now as the main strength of the Crusaders came up, and retreated towards the hills.

"I expected it," replied the King, when Wulf had told him what had occurred. "Saladin knows that Acre cannot hold out much longer, and tried to raise the siege. Mark my words, Wulf, now this attack has failed the garrison will offer to surrender."

Sure enough, the next day the emirs commanding in Acre sent messengers offering to surrender the town, if life and liberty were promised to the garrison. Liberty was too much to ask, however ; for Acre held some of Saladin's greatest emirs, and it would have been folly to allow them liberty simply to wage further war. So the offer was refused.

That night, Wulf and Thibaut, with a number of Sir Richard de Camville's men-at-arms who had followed the young squire to the Holy Land, were in charge

of a section of the entrenchments guarding the Christian camp. The night was very still. No sound broke the silence of the sleeping camp, where the soldiers lay in deep slumber, exhausted by the exertions of a day spent under a broiling eastern sun. It was intensely dark. Everything was swallowed up in an all-pervading blackness, save that inland, some eight miles away, hundreds of twinkling camp-fires proclaimed the presence of Saladin's army.

"The Saracens make merry to-night," remarked Thibaut. "Never before have I seen so many fires."

"'Tis so indeed. I had not marked it before," replied Wulf anxiously. "What think you is the meaning?"

"Meaning, young sir!" laughed the veteran. "Why, 'tis either some special festival, or else Saladin has received reinforcements. What other meaning could there be?"

"It might be to make us think the very things you say, and so throw us off our guard."

"Faith! young sir," cried Thibaut, "I had not thought of that; yet 'tis true enough. Lad, guard that head of yours, for in time to come it will be more valuable to you than all your brawn and muscle. Any fool can make a good fighter, but it requires brains to be a good leader. I will visit the sentries, and warn them to be vigilant."

"There is something strange here that I cannot understand," said Thibaut to Wulf on his return. "Young Alric declares that, a while ago, a man muffled

in a black cloak approached him and asked who commanded the guard at this part of the line. The man was civil enough, so Alric answered, 'Squire Oswald of Hawkhurst.' Since then the lad has been wondering who the man was ; and when I passed, he told me what he had done. Now, young sir, I like it not. There is something that smacks strongly of the spy in this."

"So 'twould seem," answered Wulf, "and yet what gain is there in knowing who commands a certain watch?" Even as he spoke, however, he recollected the dark chapel, and the crossbow bolt. Was the unknown at work again?

Turning, Wulf gazed towards the sleeping camp. Two lights burned where no lights had been before. "Wounded Crusaders sleepless in their pain," said Wulf to himself, and turned again towards the open country where danger lay.

An hour passed without alarm, and still the fires blazed on the distant hills, and still the same two lights burned in the camp behind. Somehow they filled Wulf with a vague uneasiness. More than once he was on the point of dispatching a man to have them put out, and then stopped himself. What harm could two lights do? No, the danger lay in front. And danger there was. Wulf felt it coming. If only there were a moon! He could not see three yards ahead in the dense darkness. Anything might be happening out there on the plain between the two armies.

Wulf called Thibaut and whispered in his ear; the next moment he had climbed the barricade, and dropped

into the ditch beyond. Having scrambled up the farther side, Wulf crept forward, listening as he went. The night was absolutely still; even the jackals that usually prowled around the camp at night, were silent. That alone seemed suspicious to Wulf. Something out there had scared the jackals away. He would return and send to the camp for reserves. So he turned, and started back to the barricade. The lights—they were useful guides. But for them, he would not have known, in this darkness, which was his own part of the line. *Guides!* The word let a great flood of light into Wulf's mind. Oh, what a fool he had been! They *were* guides; signals set there to guide the Saracens against his section of the line, in the hope that he might be disgraced or slain. It was a cunning plan; for the traitor thus served his Moslem masters, and gratified his own spite, at the same time.

"Thibaut, the lights!" shouted Wulf, as he raced towards the barricade. He leapt down into the ditch, and then quickly scrambled up the other side. Even as he regained the camp, one of the sentries challenged. The rush of hundreds of feet suddenly sounded close at hand. Too late to extinguish the lights now! They had fulfilled their task. Calling to his trumpeter, Wulf ordered him to sound the alarm.

As the brazen notes broke the silence, the camp woke to life; and at the same moment, with a deep-throated shout, a swarm of Saracens appeared out of the night, and fell upon the thin English line.

The surprise was complete; and, outnumbered ten to one, Wulf and his men could but fall slowly back,

desperately contesting every foot of ground. In the darkness it was impossible to see what was happening. From all along the line came the din of battle, but it was only at the point where Wulf had been stationed that the enemy had broken through. There must be thousands of them. Wulf caught the gleam of steel, and the flash of fierce eyes, and smote and smote again at shadowy forms which sprang at him out of the darkness. Half his men were down, but he himself was miraculously unhurt. Now help was beginning to arrive, and as the hastily armed French and English ran up, the Saracen advance was gradually checked, and then slowly the Crusaders began to force them back.

The worst danger was past, indeed, but the fight lasted another hour ere the last Saracen to invade the camp had been killed or driven out, and the line made whole again. Then, leaning upon his war-stained sword, Wulf took count of his men. Out of the hundred who had followed him from Cyprus, but forty answered the roll-call; and the tears ran down Wulf's cheeks as he realized his loss.

"'Twas my fault, Thibaut," he said, as the veteran adroitly bandaged a slash in his arm. "Marked you how the attack was pressed home only at this part of the line? 'Twas a planned thing. Had I not been a blind fool, I should have known that treachery was afoot, and sent back for help."

"Nay, lad, you are overwrought. None could have done more than you did, and I dare vouch the King will think as I do."

The next morning Wulf obeyed the King's summons with a beating heart. He found Richard propped up on his couch, and attended by the Earl of Leicester and several of his chief nobles.

"Welcome, Wulf!" he cried. "I am right glad to see you alive, lad. Tell us what happened. 'Twas touch and go, I hear."

Briefly Wulf related the events of the night; but when he came to the lights, and told of his suspicions, a Norman baron, Hugh of Evreux, broke in with a scornful laugh.

"Lights, Sire!" he sneered. "Who would show lights, and why should one part of the line be chosen more than another? Methinks this squire seeks excuses for his lack of vigilance."

"Excuses!" flared Wulf.

"Silence, lad," said the King, firmly. "Hugh, I mislike your words. This squire has ever proved himself a loyal man; and, as to these lights, others saw them, and have spoken of them. Wulf," he continued, turning to the squire, "you please me well. Many times you have done great service; and, from those present last night, I hear that but for your valiant stand against great odds the camp had been overrun. Kneel, lad! Nay, hesitate not, 'tis a reward long overdue." And as Wulf fell on his knees, the King picked up his sword, and, touching him on the shoulder, cried, "Arise, Sir Wulf Oswald!"

As Wulf rose to his feet, quite taken aback by the unexpected honour, the nobles gathered round to con-

gratulate him, only Hugh of Evreux holding sneeringly aloof.

Later, as Wulf returned to his own tent, he met William du Bois.

"Ha! Sir Wulf," began the other, but Wulf stopped him.

"Don't be foolish, William. You know I shall always be plain 'Wulf' to you. But tell me, who is this Baron Hugh of Evreux in Normandy?"

"What of him?" asked Du Bois, instead of answering the question.

"But a short while ago he tried to blacken my character in the eyes of the King," replied Wulf hotly.

"Like man, like master," answered William. "'Tis Baron Hugh of Evreux that Fulk Fitz Aymon serves as squire."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BATTLE OF ARSUF.

The repulse of the night attack sealed the fate of Acre. The defences were crumbling fast, and, though still ailing, Richard had himself carried into the fighting line so that he might direct the attack. All day his stone-casters pounded on the walls, whilst his archers swept the battlements with arrows, so that it was death for a Saracen to show himself.

Then, as night fell, the miners crawled forth from their dark tunnels, after firing the mines behind them; and as the timber supports burnt through, a great piece

of wall fell, leaving a wide breach. Thèreupon Richard had it proclaimed throughout the army that every man who brought away a stone from the breach should be rewarded.

Great was the rush of the English troops to win this reward. With the first light of day they swarmed into the breach in such numbers that they had almost fought their way into the city, when the Saracen commanders, fearing what would happen did the Crusaders force an entrance, again offered to surrender. Thereafter followed six days of negotiations ; and then, dismissing all hope of help from Saladin, the Saracen generals accepted the terms imposed by the Kings of England and France, and the city opened its gates to the besiegers. Thus, after four years, did the Christian banners again float over the walls of Acre.

The Crusaders spent six weeks in Acre, during which time King Philip, whose heart had never been in the venture, gave the Duke of Burgundy command of the French troops, and started back to France. The claims to the Crown of Jerusalem were also settled, Guy of Lusignan being declared King during his lifetime, whilst Conrad of Montferrat was named his successor.

King Richard was now in supreme command of the Christian army, and on August 21st he gave orders that all should be ready to leave Acre the following day. The route lay southward along the seashore, the plan of campaign being to recapture the coast cities ere the army marched on Jerusalem.

Each man carried food for ten days, whilst the fleet,

loaded with stores, kept pace with the army, ready to supply anything the host might need. In the van rode Richard with his English and Norman followers, his banner, which was mounted on wheels, serving as a guide to the whole host, whilst the rearguard consisted of the French contingent commanded by the Duke of Burgundy.

It was not long before the Crusaders began to experience the full hardships of the campaign. The country had been laid waste by Saladin, and everything that might be of use to the Crusaders either destroyed or carried away. The roads were mere tracks; and, all day long, men and horses ploughed their way through burning sand, whilst the Syrian sun blazed down upon them out of a sky of brass. Soon the path of the army was strewn with countless articles—wearing apparel, loot, anything and everything not absolutely necessary, which the weary soldiers could cast aside to lighten their burdens. And, to make matters worse, the lightly armed Saracen cavalry hung ever upon the flank of the Crusaders, ready to swoop down in a wild charge at the slightest sign of confusion in the Christian ranks.

So the army marched slowly down the coast, passing through Haifa, Athlit, and Cæsarea. It was a terrible march! Soldiers dropped dead from sheer exhaustion, whilst the fleet was soon crowded with men unable to march any farther, or who had been wounded in the constant skirmishing with the Saracens. Food was scarce, too, especially amongst the common soldiers, and often they came to blows over the carcasses of the horses slain by the enemy's darts.

"This enterprise threatens more difficulty than I had imagined," said Wulf to Roger, who, having lost his master in the siege of Acre, had attached himself to his friend. "I wish we could decide the matter once and for all in a pitched battle. Had I not felt it, I had not thought the sun could blaze with such intense heat. 'Tis sapping our strength. Daily more men drop out, whilst these constant affrays are doing us much harm ; for though we lose but a man or two, yet the numbers mount up, and we cannot replace our losses as can Saladin."

The army was encamped on the banks of the Salt River, south of Cæsarea, and at the edge of a tract of wild wooded country called the Forest of Arsuf. Through this forest the army passed the next day, and at nightfall emerged into the flat, cultivated country round Arsuf, where they found Saladin awaiting to give them battle with all his host.

"You'll get your wished-for battle to-morrow, Wulf," said Roger, that night, "though even if we win, I see not that we shall be much better off. Were the whole army united, it might be different ; but you know that many of the foreigners are jealous of King Richard and chafe beneath his rule, while others already weary of the venture, and wish to return to Acre."

"Out upon you, man !" cried Wulf. "What ails you to-night that you croak like a raven ?"

"I know not," answered Roger. "Yet, Wulf, I feel that danger threatens."

"Danger, Roger ! Why, that is nothing new."

"Nay, Wulf, I mean not the clean danger of lance and sword and the open fight. I mean the danger of the unseen foe. Have you discovered aught regarding your unknown enemy?"

"Nothing, Roger. I have my suspicions; yet, though I feel sure 'tis Fulk Fitz Aymon, I can prove nothing."

Soon after this conversation, the friends rolled themselves in their cloaks, and fell asleep, whilst from behind a near-by bush a dark figure rose, and slipped away through the darkness. Later, the same figure might have been seen speaking to two others. For some minutes the consultation lasted; then a bag, from which came the chink of money, changed hands, and the trio parted, swallowed up in the blackness of the night.

The call of trumpets early aroused Wulf and Roger from their sleep. In the east the sun was just rising above a range of wooded hills. All round them were the hum and the stir of preparation. To-day at last the Crusaders were to come to grips with their elusive foe, and all were eager for the fray.

The town of Arsuf lay some six miles ahead, at the end of a narrow plain bounded on the right hand by the sea, whilst on the left, three miles inland, rose the low range of hills where the army of Saladin was gathered.

Having eaten their meagre breakfast, the Crusaders were marshalled for the coming battle. The army numbered about one hundred thousand men. In the centre rode the knights, squires, and mounted men-at-arms—a solid body of steel-clad men—protected in front,

rear, and on both flanks, by thousands of archers, cross-bowmen, and other foot-soldiers.

Thus arrayed, the Christian army began its march. Strict commands had been given that the cavalry were on no account to break their ranks and charge until King Richard gave the word ; and as the army plodded along, Richard and the Duke of Burgundy rode up and down the flanks, encouraging the soldiers, and seeing that every man kept his place.

Now ahead of them, at the foot of the hills, the Crusaders saw the host of Saladin—three hundred thousand strong—drawn up in battle array. From the enemy's ranks came the strains of barbaric music. Then as the Crusaders drew abreast of the Saracens, there rose a sudden blare of countless horns and trumpets, and at the sound thousands of horsemen detached themselves from the enemy's main body, and came charging down upon the Christian army.

In a mad flood they poured down upon the Crusaders. There were thousands upon thousands of them—Arabs, Turks, black Soudanese, and desert Bedouins—a yelling horde of fanatics, whose one thought was to slay, and slay, until they themselves were slain. No fear of death could deter them ; for were they not convinced that those who fell in conflict with the misbelieving Christians would go straight to Paradise ?

Behind these clouds of irregular troops advanced the main body of Saladin's army, compact squadrons of regular cavalry led by his greatest emirs, and dense masses of foot-soldiers armed with sword and mace.

From end to end of the line the Christian army was now assailed, and a hail of darts and arrows fell upon the closely packed ranks. These missiles did no harm to the mail-clad horsemen, whilst the gambesons* of the foot-soldiers were a sufficient protection against the Saracen arrows. Very different, however, was the effect of the crossbow bolts and clothyard shafts of the Europeans. The Saracens wore little protective armour, and the missiles of the Christians slew them by hundreds.

The horses of the Crusaders were the worst sufferers, and scores of knights had their steeds killed under them, and were forced to fight on foot. Yet, in spite of the fanatical bravery of the Moslems, in spite of the terrible heat which caused hundreds of men to drop exhausted, the army continued to move forward, though now its pace was reduced to a crawl.

"I wish the King would order the charge," cried Wulf impatiently.

"So do I, Sir Wulf," replied a knight who was riding near. "See!" he continued, rising in his stirrups. "The main attack is now upon our rear, and the rearguard are marching backwards, their faces to the enemy."

"'Tis unlike the King to shirk a fight," remarked Roger Dalton. "Methinks he must have some good reason for keeping us inactive. Perhaps he waits the decisive moment to crush the enemy once and for all."

"I doubt not he has a reason, good squire," replied the knight. "But meanwhile the rearguard is being

* Long padded coats reaching to the knees.

driven in. Look, yonder goes a Hospitaller to beg leave to charge."

But the King still forbade his cavalry to break their ranks.

So the fight raged on, and the vanguard was already entering the gardens surrounding Arsuf, when the Grand Master of the Hospitallers sent again to the King, saying that his foot-soldiers were being attacked by an overwhelming number of Turks armed with maces and swords, and he begged leave for his knights to charge.

"Endure yet a while, good Master," replied the King.

But now, exasperated beyond endurance, the Hospitallers would hold back no longer. On receiving Richard's answer, two knights turned their horses, and with shouts of "Saint George, Saint George!" they charged headlong into the masses of the enemy, followed by their brethren.

Instantly the rearguard was thrown into confusion, and a great disaster threatened. But Richard, grasping the situation at a glance, ordered the trumpeters to sound the charge, and all along the line the Christian cavalry charged forward upon the enemy.

Richard, with his immediate followers, spurred directly for the rear of the army; and, falling upon the Turks who had been pressing the rearguard so hard, he drove them headlong from the field. Mounted on a horse of matchless speed, the King was often far in front of his followers; and once he was surrounded and in danger of his life, when Wulf cut his way through the ring of his enemies, and went to his rescue.

"Good sword!" cried the King. Then, recognizing his rescuer, he said with a laugh, "What, Wulf? Thou art a fighter after my own heart. I love thee, lad." Then the press of the fight separated them again.

Now the Christians were advancing all along the line, driving the Saracens before them, until at last, weary of slaughter, they stayed the pursuit, and, rallying round the standard, formed up to continue the march.

But no sooner did Saladin see the Christians break off their attack than he rallied his men, and launched them anew upon the Christian host. Again the fight raged fiercely. Again the Christian chivalry charged the dark masses of the Saracens, and drove them in head-long rout.

This time the pursuit was fast and furious, and carried the Christian knights far from their main body, up into the hills. Before Wulf rode a richly clad Saracen, some emir by his dress; and, forgetful of all caution in the excitement of the pursuit, Wulf followed his quarry, calling upon him again and again to turn and fight.

Often the Saracen looked back, and then rode on again, controlling the pace of his Arab steed so that he kept ever the same distance ahead of his pursuer. Now they were amongst trees, and for a moment alone; then, turning suddenly, the Saracen charged furiously at Wulf.

Wulf, good swordsman though he was, now found himself sore beset. The Saracen's gleaming scimitar seemed to be a whirling thing of fire, and more than once it was only Wulf's mail that kept out the deadly blade. Then, as the fighters engaged again, the horses plunged

together, with such force that the lighter Saracen was unseated and thrown to the ground.

Wulf sprang from his horse, and bent over his prostrate enemy. As he did so, there came a quick foot-step behind him; for one moment Wulf was conscious of a crashing blow upon the back of his head, and then everything went dark.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIGHT IN THE PASS.

To Wulf it seemed that he was at the bottom of a deep, dark well, and that he was ceaselessly trying to climb upwards to a tiny point of light far above. Sometimes he almost reached the light, and then he would sink back into the well until the light was no longer visible.

But at last, after what seemed months and years of climbing, there came a time when the light was so big that there was no more darkness; and suddenly he realized that he was lying on a bed, gazing at a square window through which daylight streamed.

For some minutes Wulf gazed straight before him. Then he tried to move, and, finding that he could not stir hand or foot, he uttered a feeble cry of exasperation.

At the sound an old woman, with white hair and dark, lined face, rose from beside the bed, and bent over him.

“Allah be praised, you are awake at last!” she



·Wulf sprang from his horse, and bent over his prostrate enemy.'—Page 98.

cried. "Oft have I feared you would never wake again. Drink this, and sleep once more." So saying, she held a cup to Wulf's lips, and poured some warm fluid down his throat.

When Wulf awoke, it was dark. Again he slept, and later he opened his eyes in a room bright with sunshine. He tried to move, and to his joy succeeded in raising a hand. At the movement the same old woman bent over him.

"You are better," she said. "Nay, speak not. Drink!" He did so, and again sank into a deep slumber.

When he awoke, he felt much stronger; and now, under the skilful nursing of the old woman, he made rapid strides to recovery. But when he asked her what had happened, and how long he had been ill, she became dumb. All she would say was that he was in the castle of the emir Scecedin.

But who *was* the emir Scecedin? Wulf remembered the battle of Arsuf. He also remembered pursuing a Saracen emir into the hills, and the fight that followed. After that everything became blank. Nouronihar, as the old woman was called, had told him he had been wounded on the head. But how had he come by the wound? It was a question Wulf could not answer.

One day, about six weeks after Wulf had recovered consciousness, the door opened to admit a tall, handsome man. He was the same man as Wulf had pursued on the day of the battle, and he naturally guessed that here was the emir Scecedin.

"I rejoice to see you better," said the emir. "The Frank struck you ere I could slay him, or ——"

"The Frank!" exclaimed Wulf, intensely surprised.

"Even so. The traitor stepped from behind a bush, and smote you with a great axe. Your steel cap saved your life, but you have lain as one bereft of reason for five months."

"*Five months!*" cried Wulf, still amazed. "Impossible!"

"Nothing is impossible," replied the emir gravely. "Else Nouronihar had despaired of your life long ago."

He then told Wulf news of the war, how the Christians had taken Joppa and Ascalon, but, beyond that, had accomplished little. "Could your great Richard have his way, he might conquer the land," continued the emir. "But dissensions and jealousy prevail amongst the leaders. One wants one thing, and one wants another, so in the end nothing is done."

Wulf puzzled long over what he had heard. Why had the emir brought him to his castle, and had him nursed back to life? And who was the Frank who had struck him down? Fitz Aymon? But surely even Fitz Aymon would not have stooped to such a deed!

Another month passed, and Wulf was almost well, and walked daily upon the battlements of the castle, which was perched on the summit of a rocky crag in the midst of a jumbled mass of mountains. Often he thought of escape, but saw no way unless he had help from within.

Then one day, as he paced the battlements, the emir

came to him, and for a time spoke of unimportant things. But presently the emir said, "Sir Knight, I saved your life, and had you nursed back to health, albeit you are an enemy to my faith. For that perhaps you owe me thanks. Now, I offer you freedom, asking only in return that you inform me from time to time what befalls in the Christian camp, and what you can learn of your leader's plans. Serve me well, and I will load you with riches; nor do I ask other guarantee than your word of honour that you will do as I ask, ere I set you free."

For some moments Wulf was too amazed to answer. When he could find words, he said, "For your care I thank you, Emir; but were freedom a thousand times more precious, were you to offer me all the riches of the east, I would not do this thing."

For a moment Englishman and Saracen faced each other; then the emir beckoned two soldiers to him, and spoke in Arabic, whereon they ranged themselves one on either side of Wulf. "Hearken, infidel," threatened the emir. "I have been asked to kill you, and kill you I will, if you do not obey. A week you shall have to meditate on this matter. By that time freedom may seem more precious."

"*I have been asked to kill you.*" The words rang in Wulf's ears, as the soldiers led him to a place very different from the light, airy room which he had previously occupied. It was a narrow cell, cut out of the rock upon which the castle was built. A bundle of straw was the only furnishing. It was cold and cheerless; and as the massive door clanged to, and the jailers

shot the heavy bolts, Wulf's heart sank within him. Who was this secret foe that desired his death? None knew that he was a prisoner, except those in the castle. Crossing to the narrow, barred window, Wulf looked out. His cell was on the very edge of an immense precipice. There was no escape that way.

Three days passed, and Wulf saw no one but the jailer who brought him his daily ration of water and coarse food. It was the third night, when he awoke to the sound of bolts being drawn. A moment later the door opened slowly, and Wulf, rising silently to his feet, made ready to spring. Was the emir sending some midnight assassin to rid him of his prisoner?

"Silence!" whispered a familiar voice, and the old woman Nouronihar slipped into the cell. "I have come to aid you. Speak not, but listen. I know the emir Scecedin, and the bargain he has proposed to you. He is without mercy; and when you refuse a second time, he will kill you. Therefore you must escape. Here is a rope, a robe such as the desert Bedouins wear, your sword, and a file. Hide them within the straw of your bed. To-morrow night file through the bars of your window, and descend the rope. Where the rope ends, you will find a narrow track. Follow it to the bottom of the ravine, where a horse will await you. Mount and ride towards the setting sun. *The Lion is in Ascalon.* Now farewell! Allah guard you, and may I be forgiven for aiding an unbeliever!"

Without allowing Wulf time to speak, the old woman slipped from the cell, closing the door behind her.

Wulf spent the next day in a fever of impatience ; and as soon as darkness fell, he set to work on the iron bars. They were old and rusty, and he soon had a hole large enough to squeeze his body through. It was dizzy work descending the rope in the pitchy darkness ; but, sooner than he expected, his feet touched a narrow track, and, feeling his way step by step, he at length found himself on level ground. Pausing, he looked around him.

Some darker shadow moved in the darkness ahead ; and, creeping forward, Wulf found a horse—saddled and bridled, with water-skins and food-bags attached to the saddle—standing tied to a stunted tree. Nouronihar had, indeed, served him well. Springing on to the horse, Wulf rode away through the night.

It was pitchy dark at the bottom of the ravine, and Wulf could see nothing. He knew, however, that the gorge led in the right direction ; for the rest, he trusted to his steed to pick its way amongst the boulders which strewed the bottom of the ravine.

All night he rode, and morning found him amidst a jumbled maze of mountains. There he came to a halt, and looked around. No signs of human habitation were visible ; and, having eaten, and slept an hour, Wulf continued his journey.

That night he lay in a cave, and fell asleep, with pleasant thoughts of Isabel and freedom. He was roused by the clash of steel, and, springing to his feet, Wulf rushed to the mouth of the cave, sword in hand. Dawn was just breaking, and in the dim light Wulf saw below him a single white-robed warrior defending

himself against six Arabs. He leapt upon his horse, and rode towards the combatants, who were so intent on the fray that none of them noticed his approach. Then, as Wulf drew nearer, he saw something which made him spur his steed to a furious gallop. Beneath his white eastern robe the lone fighter wore western mail.

Now the drumming of hoofs reached the fighters, and, looking up, the Arabs beheld a tall mounted warrior bearing down upon them; but, as the new-comer wore native dress, they naturally took him for a friend, and turned again to the fray. The next moment the stranger was amongst them, and a long sword smote once, twice, and thrice, felling a man with each blow. Thereafter there were none to smite; for with cries of "'Tis Satan! Fly! Fly!" the survivors leapt upon their horses, and galloped panic-stricken away.

Wulf dismounted, and approached the lone warrior, who was leaning exhausted against a rock. As he did so, the other uttered a cry of amazement. "By the Cross! you are either Wulf of Hawkhurst, or his double."

"I am Wulf of Hawkhurst," he replied. "But who are you who know me, and whom I find thus beset?"

"I am Roger Dalton," replied the warrior, and then he fainted.

An hour later, his wounds having been bound up, Roger was seated on Wulf's horse—his own could not be found—and, with Wulf on foot beside him, was riding down the valley.

"Last evening," he was saying to his rescuer, "I saw an Arab riding out of Ascalon, and it appeared to me

that he rode not as those desert riders; but stiffly as a European. So I hastily procured this disguise and followed, and all night he rode on, never looking behind. Yet he must have known I followed; for as I reached the spot where you found me, he made a sign, and I was suddenly beset by men who seemed to rise from the ground.—Nay, I saw not the man's face, so I know not who he was; but, Wulf, methinks here is treachery."

"So think I, Roger; yet, knowing so little, we can do naught but watch. There are many things I cannot understand; and though they seem different, perchance they all spring from the same source." Then Wulf related the strange story of his own adventures.

At noonday they rested an hour, and then started forward again. Now another range of hills rose before them, and the track grew steep. Often Roger glanced back, and presently he bade Wulf look behind. The valley seemed to lie desolate below them; but, guided by Roger's pointing arm, Wulf at last espied a small, moving cloud. "Dust!" croaked Roger, for he was weary with his wounds. "Horsemen! We are followed."

Now the friends hastened, but ever the track grew steeper, whilst their pursuers gained swiftly upon them, so that soon the fugitives saw the sun glancing on steel cap and spear-head.

"No Bedouins those!" exclaimed Roger. "Wulf, we cannot both escape, so take your horse and ride, I pray you."

"Don't be foolish," answered Wulf shortly, and

urged the weary horse to greater speed. The way had become suddenly narrow, with high perpendicular cliffs on either hand; and, glancing around him, Wulf conceived a plan whereby they might possibly escape. They were now nearing the top of the pass. The track was so narrow that they could not walk abreast; it was desperately steep, too. With a final scramble, they reached the summit of the rise, and found themselves gazing out across ten miles of country to Ascalon and the sea.

“Hearken, Roger!” cried Wulf urgently. “If we both go on, we shall be overtaken and slain. Now this is a place where one man might fight an army. Do you therefore ride on and fetch help, whilst I keep this pass against those who follow.—Nay, do not argue! ’Tis our only chance. Go!” And, giving the horse a sharp smack, Wulf sent it scrambling down towards the plains below.

Wulf set to work at once. At the summit of the pass he built a barricade of boulders, and placed others so that a push would send them hurtling down upon any who approached. Then, having made ready, he sat down to await the enemy.

It was hot in that narrow place, and Wulf was glad to rest. Soon, however, the rattle of a stone brought him to his feet; and, peering over his barricade, he saw a horseman come round a bend some way below, and start to climb towards him. Another followed, and another; and then, as if aware of the imminent danger, the leader suddenly halted. At the same moment Wulf loosed a

boulder, and the mass of rock, gathering speed every instant, went crashing down the narrow path upon the horsemen below. There was no escape. One frenzied cry of fear ! Then Wulf's missile had done its work, and the track below was clear of enemies.

Cries of fury from round the bend greeted Wulf's success, and from a dozen bows a shower of arrows rattled harmlessly against the barricade, behind which Wulf crouched, awaiting the next rush.

It was not long in coming ; and, this time, the Saracens advanced on foot, led by a huge dusky warrior. Two-thirds of the way up they scrambled, and then Wulf launched his second boulder. Down it bounded, and, striking against a point of rock, burst into a thousand fragments, which carried death and destruction amongst the Saracens. But the Saracens were brave men, and the survivors from that terrible discharge sprang forward over the bodies of their comrades, and launched themselves against the barricade.

Now began a desperate fight. The Saracens could only approach Wulf one by one ; and, wielding his long sword, he cut down man after man, as they tried to mount the barrier. Presently a man armed with a long spear pushed to the front, and flung himself upon the young Englishman. Just in time Wulf saw the stabbing point, and flattened himself against the rock wall, so that the spear sped past him. The next moment his sword had fallen upon the Saracen's head, whilst, bending down, Wulf seized the lance as it slipped from the man's grasp.



‘Now began a desperate fight.’—Page 108.

Armed with the spear, Wulf could meet his enemies on equal terms ; and as they climbed towards him, he stabbed downwards, until at last they drew back, no longer daring to face that deadly spear and sword.

The archers now resumed the fight, and showered arrows against the barricade. But the boulders that Wulf had piled together served him well, and, crouching low, he escaped unharmed.

But he was weary, desperately weary, and he knew he could not sustain the fight much longer. He could hear someone speaking below, and presently recognized the voice of the emir Scecedin. The emir was urging his men to make one more charge, and kill the infidel who had slain their brethren. The fiery words were goading the Saracens to fury ; and a fierce shout greeted the end of the speech, followed by a rush of feet.

Wulf reared himself up behind the barricade to make his last stand. Here they came like wolves scenting their quarry. The long blade rose and fell, rose and fell, rose and fell, and with each stroke a dark-skinned warrior started on the road to Paradise. Yet always there was another to take his place. Wulf's arms were like lead, his legs failing under him.

Ha ! but Sir Wulf Oswald of Hawkhurst should die as became his lineage and his lady. No skulking behind a barricade ! “ St. George ! St. George ! ” Gathering up all the strength that was left him, Wulf shouted the English battle-cry, and launched himself forward upon the enemy. “ St. George ! St. George ! ” The cry echoed in the narrow space. But was it merely an echo ?

His fair hair dishevelled, his face ghastly white, his long sword all ruddy, Wulf flung himself upon the Saracens, and, coming upon them thus, he seemed more than human. One man he cut down—two—and then panic, desperate unreasoning panic, seized upon the remainder, and, flinging away their arms, they fled from the accursed place. “St. George ! St. George !” Leaning upon his sword, Wulf sent the battle-cry hurtling after his foes. Then he swayed, and fell.

“St. George ! St. George !” It was no echo. Men were racing up the path behind. A mighty, mail-clad figure sprang over the barricade, and bent over Wulf.

“He but faints. By the Cross ! sirs, this man has gained more honour in an hour than most of us can hope to acquire in a lifetime. Did he not offer his life for his friend’s ? ”

Stooping, the King lifted Wulf in his arms, and bore him to the waiting horses.

CHAPTER X.

TRIAL BY BATTLE.

Wulf received a great welcome from Thibaut and the survivors of his little band, who had long given him up for dead, and the King was overjoyed at his return. He had come almost scathless through the fray in the pass, and, after a night’s rest, was little the worse for his adventures. Roger was less fortunate, however ; for

though his wounds were comparatively slight, they were sufficient to keep him to his bed for some days.

"What has happened whilst I have been a prisoner?" asked Wulf, when he came to see how Roger was progressing.

"Little enough," replied Roger, gloomily. "Three days after the battle of Arsuf we entered Joppa, and found that the Saracens had destroyed the fortifications ere leaving the town. Yet 'twas pleasant amidst the vineyards and orchards of Joppa, and we rested there contentedly enough until we heard that the Saracens, rather than defend Ascalon, were treating that city in the same manner. Thereupon the King would have marched at once on Ascalon, and captured it ere the walls were totally destroyed. But the French were against the plan, insisting that the army should rebuild Joppa before attempting aught else; so, rather than cause dissension between allies, King Richard gave way.

"Seven weeks we spent in Joppa, and then, on the last day of October, we started on the march to Jerusalem. We were filled with enthusiasm, Wulf. Our hearts beat with joy, for were we not at last marching to our goal? And already in thought we were masters of the blessed city.

"Alas for our high hopes! We advanced slowly to Ramleh—Saladin's army ever threatening our van—and there we went into winter quarters for three weeks. Then we started forward again, and marched to Beit Nuba, where we again halted.

"You cannot imagine the misery of that time, Wulf. - Saladin had disbanded his army and withdrawn to Jerusalem, leaving swarms of irregular cavalry to hinder our advance. And, besides that, the Syrian winter was against us.

"May I never spend another such winter ! Tempests of rain and hail beat upon us day after day. The wind tore up our tents and broke our tent-poles, leaving us without shelter. Our food went bad, our clothes rotted, and our mail rusted in the everlasting rain. Men and horses sickened and died by hundreds. A fortnight we endured these miseries ; then, realizing the hopelessness of laying siege to Jerusalem—for even could we take the city, we lacked the strength to hold it—our leaders ordered the retreat. Nine days later we entered Ascalon, a ruined and depopulated city. Since then we have been busy repairing the walls.

"There is little more to tell, Wulf, and that is merely the same tale of failure. Jealousy and dissension have been fighting Saladin's battles for him. The French have deserted King Richard. Conrad de Montferrat is dead. Henry of Champagne, the King's nephew, has been proclaimed King of Jerusalem, whilst Guy of Lusignan, who is unfitted to rule this turbulent country, has been consoled with the Kingdom of Cyprus.

"King Richard has his own worries, too. News has come from England that his brother, Prince John, is plotting against him ; and altogether, Wulf, methinks that the King cannot remain much longer in this country."

Worried though he was at the news from England, Richard had one more task to do before he could quit Palestine. This was the capture of Darum, the most important coast fortress still held by the Saracens ; and, ten days after Wulf's return, the King, supported only by his own troops, set out to effect its capture.

Darum stood eight miles south of Gaza. •It was a fortress of immense strength, and to Wulf and Roger, gazing at the mighty walls and turrets, it seemed a hopeless task that the King had undertaken. Richard, however, set about his preparations with vigour. The fleet had brought three stone-casters from Ascalon ; and, working under the fiery sun, beside his meanest soldier, Richard helped to carry the great machines across a mile of shifting sand, and to set them up before the walls of the fortress.

Then Richard divided his little army, so that whilst one half rested the other worked ; and thereafter, both day and night, the ponderous stones crashed continually against the walls, causing them to shake and crumble, whilst underground the miners burrowed beneath the foundations. Three days and nights the bombardment continued, and on the evening of the fourth day a large tower showed signs of collapsing.

Thud ! Thud ! Thud ! Wearied with the day's labours, Wulf tossed from side to side, unable to sleep for the incessant crash of the great stones ; and at last, tired of lying wakeful on his hard couch, he rose and left the tent. His steps took him away from the camp ; and as he strolled along, he glanced at the grim towers

which rose above him, black and forbidding in the light of a rising moon.

Thud! Thud! A dull crash followed, and Wulf knew that a piece of wall had fallen. Suddenly he felt heartily tired of war, and a great longing came over him for the cool green forest where he had his home. What was Isabel doing at that very hour, he wondered? He still had her scarf. And Fulk—he had not seen Fulk since his escape. Was Fulk a traitor? If not he, who *was* his secret enemy, always trying to work him ill?

The sound of footsteps disturbed Wulf's reverie, and, glancing round, he beheld a shrouded figure cross a patch of moonlight some way off. Instantly alert, Wulf followed to see who this night-prowler might be. He lost him; then another patch of moonlight showed up the dark figure, and Wulf sped in pursuit. Now the man had disappeared in the shadow of a great tower; and, hurrying after him, Wulf suddenly found himself gripped by sinewy arms.

Desperately Wulf struggled; and as his assailant raised an arm to strike, he drove home his fist with all his strength. With a choking cry the man collapsed. Then, as he heard the rush of many feet, Wulf turned and sped back to the camp.

On reaching his tent, he set himself to think the matter out. Who was the shrouded figure, and whom had the unknown been meeting beneath the walls of Darum? Wulf rated himself for having gone forth unarmed. With his sword he might have stood his ground, and discovered much. As it was —

Still trying to find an answer to the puzzle, Wulf fell asleep.

He was awakened by a terrific crash, and rushing from his tent, he found that the tower had fallen, leaving a great breach in the outer wall.

Now the camp was astir. Orders came that all were to prepare for the assault; and, having hastily armed themselves, the knights and men-at-arms formed up before the breach.

"My friends," cried King Richard, addressing his little force, "we have cracked this nut, and now let no man hold back, for this day we will gain much honour. Trumpeter, sound the assault!" Then, as the call blared forth, the King sprang forward, and started to climb the breach.

With a shout the Crusaders surged after him, each man straining to be the first to engage the defenders who lined the top of the breach. Side by side Wulf and Roger clambered upwards, and reached the summit at the same time as the King. For a moment the three were fiercely engaged with the defenders; then the rest of the stormers surged up and drove the Saracens back.

The fight lasted but a short time. Already disheartened at the ease with which the English had breached their walls, the Saracens made a feeble resistance, and, having lost sixty of their number, the survivors retreated within the great central keep, and closed the door upon their pursuers.

Having planted their banners upon the walls of Darum, the English next prepared to assault the keep.

This was no easy task ; for the keep was a tower of immense strength, which might well have defied an army, and for a time the Saracens made good their defence. At last, however, the besiegers brought scaling ladders ; and no sooner did the Saracens see the English swarming up the walls than they lost heart, and, casting their weapons aside, they cried out that they were ready to surrender, begging only that their lives might be spared.

It was late in the afternoon by the time the final surrender was completed ; and as Wulf was returning to his tent, a page brought him a summons to the King's presence.

He found the King attended by the Earl of Leicester and several others of his chief nobles ; and as he entered, Richard burst out,

"Ha ! Sir Wulf, I am glad to see you. There is one here who has a charge to make against you, which I am told affects your honour and loyalty. Stand forth, Fulk Fitz Aymon, and state your charge against this knight, whom I have ever found loyal and brave."

"Sire !" cried Wulf in amazement. But the King silenced him with a gesture, and, glancing towards a figure that stood in the shadow, cried, "Stand forth there !"

Watching Fulk, Wulf saw that he was ill at ease. He refused to look at Wulf, and passed his tongue repeatedly over his lips ere he spoke.

"Sire," he began at last, "I will put the matter briefly. Long ago I suspected the loyalty of this knight, and set myself to watch him. But he was cunning, and

I learned little ; and when, after the battle of Arsuf, he was seen no more, I thought him dead. Then suddenly after many months he appears again, and tells us he has been held prisoner by the emir Scedin ; yet has anyone heard of the emir demanding ransom for his release ? And for what should the emir hold him prisoner, if not for ransom ? ”

Fulk moistened his lips nervously before he continued. “ As I said, Sire, I have watched, also I have questioned those who might know, and I have learned much. The emir held Sir Wulf prisoner, because he wished to use his freedom as a bribe wherewith to persuade him to betray your plans. Ask him, Sire, if the emir did not offer him his freedom on those terms.”

“ You hear, Sir Wulf,” said the King, in a stern tone.

“ ’Tis true, Sire, that the emir made such a proposal, and no less true that I refused.”

The King regarded Wulf silently for a few moments, whilst a murmur rose from the listening barons. Then he told Fulk to proceed.

With a malicious smile Fulk continued, “ You hear, Sire, he admits the charge. Well, learning so much, I set myself to watch ; and, last evening, I encountered a Turkish lad skulking near the camp. At sight of me he fled, but I pursued and overtook him. Feeling my dagger at his throat, and on promise of freedom if he would speak the truth, he confessed he had come from the emir Scedin to meet a Frankish knight named Sir Wulf Oswald. Pressed for more, he gave me a glove

which was to prove his identity, and also told me the trysting place. Thereupon I let him go."

"Later, Sire, with certain retainers of mine I went to this place, and at midnight Sir Wulf came; and we had almost captured him, when he struck me down, and struggled free. But in his hurry to escape he dropped a glove, the very fellow of the one I had from the Turkish messenger. Behold, Sire!" and he held up two brown leather gauntlets. "They are the same, even to this small white star painted on the palm."

"One more thing, Sire, and I have done. Wishing to make no mistake, and thinking any action justified when a traitor was to be unmasked, I took the opportunity, when this man's tent was left unguarded, and sought among his gear for further proof. There I found these two gloves, like the first pair, though lacking the painted star; doubtless he held them in reserve. That is the proof of my charge, Sire. Ask him if he were not out last night, and if these gloves are not his."

"By the Rood! Sir Wulf," exclaimed the King, "things look black against you. Yet I find this story hard to believe. Speak, man! What have you to say in your defence?"

"'Tis true, Sire, I *was* astir last night, being unable to sleep," began Wulf, "and 'tis also true that those gloves were amongst my possessions; how, I will explain."

Thereupon Wulf told the King of the unknown who had dropped a glove in the chapel at Limasol. He told about the crossbow bolt that had been shot at him under

the walls of Acre, and of the second glove which William du Bois had found. "So came the two gloves into my possession, Sire, as can be proved."

Then he spoke of the lights which had guided the Saracens against his section of the barricade at Acre—of the Frank who had struck him down after the battle of Arsuf—of the unknown who had requested the emir Scecedin to kill him—of the man whom Roger had followed from Ascalon, and who had led him into the trap from which Wulf had rescued him.

"I also make a charge, Sire," he concluded. "You know how this man has ever been my enemy, and how you ordered him to take the Cross, for which I doubt not he bore you no good will. I charge Fulk Fitz Aymon with plotting against you, and also with seeking my life. I charge him with being the traitor in the chapel at Limasol, with being the secret assassin who shot at me at Acre, and with having set up the lights which guided the enemy in the night attack, hoping to satisfy his public grudge and his private one at the same time.

"I say it was he who hired the ruffian to strike me down at Arsuf, and who, being already in secret alliance with the emir Scecedin, begged the emir to kill me, since he feared my return to freedom. I dare avow that he was the man whom Roger Dalton followed out of Ascalon, and that, last night, he was out to meet some messenger from the enemy, when I surprised him."

During Wulf's recital Fulk had gone sickly white, and now he burst out, vehemently protesting that Wulf's tale was a tissue of lies.

"It smacks of truth as much as yours, Fulk Fitz Aymon," said the King sternly. "And, moreover, Sir Wulf has ever served me well, proving himself a stout fighter and a loyal man, whilst I am minded that once you did prefer my brother, Prince John. What say you, my Lords, how shall we unravel this coil?"

"Sire," cried Wulf, before an answer could be made, "this is a matter in which slur has been cast upon my honour. I charge this man with being a coward, a liar, and a traitor, and I challenge him to single combat. There lies my gage." Tearing off his glove, he flung it on the ground.

"So be it!" answered the King at length. "Methinks this is a matter, the truth of which God alone can make clear. Fitz Aymon, are you willing to maintain your charge in the lists?"

Fulk licked his lips, and glanced nervously at Wulf's great frame, remembering too late his fame as a fighter. But it was impossible to retreat now. To decline would be a confession of guilt, and therefore, though reluctantly, he accepted the challenge. The combat was fixed to take place the next morning.

On the morrow, as soon as the army had breakfasted, the men were marshalled in a hollow square, the King with his chief knights and barons occupying a raised platform on one side of the lists. Then two heralds advanced into the open space before the dais, and, having sounded a fanfare on their trumpets, cried aloud the charges that had been made, and the cause of the combat, ending by calling upon God to defend the right.

The heralds then retired ; and, amidst loud shouts from the common soldiers, the combatants advanced on foot towards the dais, and saluted the King.

Both were clad in full mail, and armed with swords. Wulf was a head taller than Fulk ; but Fulk was a good swordsman, and there were many amongst the onlookers who thought his superior agility would win him the day.

Again the trumpets sounded, and the combatants advanced into the middle of the lists, and faced each other. Then, amidst a breathless silence, the King flung down his baton, and the fight began.

Almost ere the baton left the King's hand, Fulk sprang in and sped a deadly thrust. But Wulf was prepared for some such trick ; and, parrying the thrust, he replied with a blow which Fulk avoided with difficulty. Then the combatants closed, and for a while the lists rang with the din of their blows, whilst from the onlookers rose shouts of encouragement, the Normans supporting Fulk, the English archers and men-at-arms siding loudly with Wulf.

In and out sprang Fulk, striving by sheer speed to penetrate Wulf's guard, but always it seemed as though a wall of steel confronted him. Presently it dawned on Fulk that he was outmatched, and that by no means could he reach that grim figure before him. As he realized the fact, the sweat of fear gathered on his brow, and he began to fight wildly, aiming vain blows in desperation.

Now Wulf began to attack. He had no wish to

kill Fulk—not because he was Fulk, but because he was Isabel's brother. Nevertheless, he was determined to extort a full confession from the traitor, and so he began to fight with a settled plan. Again and again his sword crashed through Fulk's guard, yet stopped short of inflicting a death-wound. Fulk's feeble attack he brushed aside as though it were naught, whilst his own blade made circles of fire round the unhappy man.

Fear, craven fear, now filled Fulk's heart. "Spare me," he gasped at last. "I am not fit to die."

"Confess then," came the grim reply.

Clang! • Clang! Clang! Sparks flew from the whirling blades.

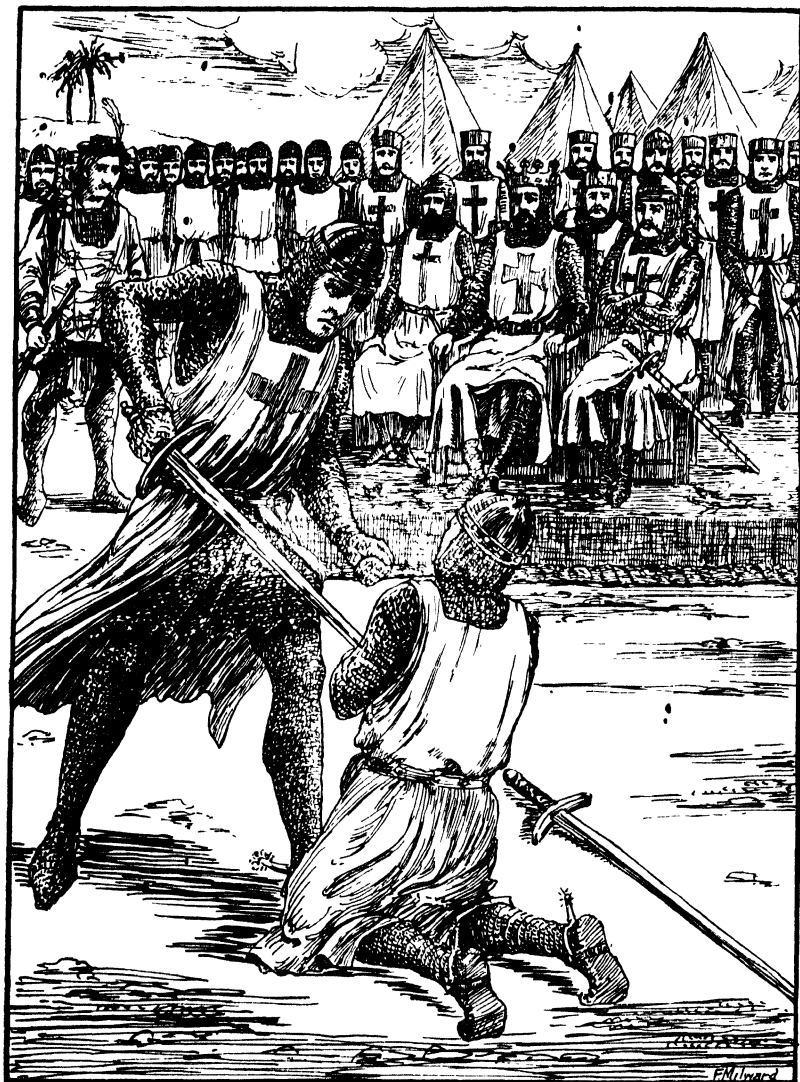
"Confess," commanded Wulf a second time, smiting Fulk's sword aside, and wounding him in the shoulder.

"Once more, confess!" And, with a slither of steel, Fulk's blade went whirling through the air, leaving him defenceless beneath Wulf's sword.

To the onlookers it seemed as though the two figures were for a moment turned to stone, so still they stood. Then, seeing the grim intention in Wulf's eyes, Fulk suddenly collapsed on his knees. "Spare me!" he cried. "I confess. I *am* the traitor. I lied and lied, hoping the King would disgrace you. Spare me!"

"By all the Saints!" thundered Richard, to whom every craven word had been audible—but ere he could continue, Wulf had flung himself on his knees before the King.

"A boon, Sire!" he cried. "This man's life is forfeit to me. I pray you spare him. Expel him from



‘Fulk suddenly collapsed on his knees.’—Page 123.

your camp, banish him from your realm, but let him live."

"By the Cross ! Wulf," began the King ; and then, as was his way, his anger vanished and he smiled. "Aye, lad, I understand. My mind goes back to a green forest glade, and a fair damsel upon a white horse. I remember she was sister to that man. Did she give you that scarf you wear ? Nay, answer not. You do her credit, Wulf, and I trust she is proud of her knight. Harken, knave !" he cried, turning to Fulk. "Your life is spared, but get you to your paynim masters, and never set foot in my realms again. Disobey at your peril."

Then, as Fulk slunk away, the King said to Wulf, "Watch yourself well, Sir Wulf. Yonder knave bears you no gratitude, and will yet try to work you ill."

CHAPTER XI.

THE RELIEF OF JOPPA.

After the capture of Darum the army retired to Ascalon, and from there the King would fain have returned to England, where Prince John was busily intriguing against him with Richard's false ally, Philip of France. But all ranks of the army begged the King to make one more attempt against Jerusalem ere he left the land, and at last, much against his will, he gave way.

It was now the height of the Syrian summer, and in intense heat Richard and his troops marched out of Ascalon on June 7th. They were soon joined by a

French contingent, and the united army managed to advance as far as Beit Nūba.

There, however, they had to halt ; and the King, with Wulf and a few other knights, left the main body of the army, to advance to the springs of Emmaus, whence they could see the Holy City.

“I shall never enter Jerusalem, Wulf,” said the King sadly to the young knight, who sat his horse by Richard’s side. “Our numbers are too few ; and, to make ill worse, Hugh of Burgundy is jealous of me, and with his Frenchmen will not act for the common good. Yon walls will never yield to an army divided against itself. Moreover, the Hospitallers and others who know this land tell me that by now the wells will be dry, and that, if we attempt a siege, the army will perish of thirst.”

It was indeed as the King said. After spending three weeks at Beit Nuba, almost within sight of Jerusalem, the army started its last retreat, and three weeks later the King was back in Acre.

Plain to all it was that the Crusade was now at an end, and negotiations for peace were proceeding between Richard and Saladin, when there came a startling interruption. It was the evening of the second day after the King’s return to Acre, and Richard was resting in his tent, when a boat entered the harbour, and soon after a sea-weary messenger rushed through the camp towards the royal pavilion, crying out that he bore tidings for the King.

“Sire,” he cried, entering Richard’s presence,

“Joppa is sore beset by Saladin and a great army. Two days ago the Saracens appeared before the city, and immediately I took boat and hastened hither to beg your aid.”

“By the Cross!” cried Richard, springing to his feet, “I will not fail them.” And instantly he gave orders that the army should prepare to set out to the relief of Joppa. But here a difficulty arose, the French refusing to leave Acre.

“Then in Heaven’s name stay behind!” flared Richard, when they announced their decision. “We want no laggards on this enterprise.” And, having marshalled his own men, he dispatched part of them by land, whilst the remainder followed him on board the galleys, and set sail for Joppa.

They had not proceeded far, however, before the wind changed and dispersed the fleet, so that it was not until the evening of July 31st, three days later, that Richard, with but three ships, arrived off the beleaguered town.

It was a dark night, and the rescuers could see naught of what was happening on shore. They did not even know if Joppa still held out, and they could do nothing until daylight came, and the rest of the fleet arrived.

Richard chafed sorely at this delay. “Sir Wulf,” he said to the young knight, as they stood side by side on the deck of the galley, gazing at the dark shore, “why does God try me thus? Here am I doing His service, and yet all Nature seems to fight against me.”

"I doubt not, Sire, it is that your glory may be greater for the obstacles overcome. Where would be the merit or the joy of conquest, if the path of victory were smooth?"

"You are wise for one so young, lad," replied the King. "Perchance you are right, and these difficulties are cast in our way so that we may prove ourselves true and worthy knights. Yet I would I knew what goes on ashore, and what my knights who rode by land are doing."

Had Richard but known it, he was to receive no aid from the land force; for, on arriving at Cæsarea, the English had found the road ahead barred by a large body of Saracens, and had been unable to advance any farther.

Meanwhile the garrison in Joppa was in desperate straits. After four days of furious fighting, Saladin's war-machines had made a breach in the city wall; and, pouring through in thousands, the Saracens had forced the garrison to seek refuge in the citadel, leaving the rest of the town to pillage and slaughter.

This occurred on July 31st, the same day that, in the evening, Richard arrived off the town. Called upon to surrender, and hourly expecting Richard to arrive with aid, the garrison made an agreement with Saladin, promising to deliver up the castle at three o'clock on the following afternoon, should no help have arrived before that time.

Thus passed the night of the 31st, the garrison still cherishing the hope that the morrow would bring them

succour, whilst the English on board the ships had no knowledge of what had taken place ashore.

Morning dawned, and great was the joy of the garrison to see some ships off shore. But as hour followed hour, and no help came from the ships, joy turned to despair. What was the King doing, that he came not to their aid ?

On board his galley Richard was equally perplexed, for he could see no sign that any part of the city held out against the Saracens.

"What think you, Sir Wulf ?" he asked, anxiously surveying the shore, where hundreds of Saracens were gathered to dispute a landing. "It seems to me that all Joppa is in the hands of the enemy."

"So it appears, Sire," replied Wulf, "and yet — By the Cross, Sire, look yonder, quick ! See, a man has leapt from that high tower into the sea. He lives too. 'Tis a miracle ! See, he has boarded the nearest galley, and they are bringing him here."

By this time it was near noon, and several of the ships dispersed by the gale had arrived, bringing welcome reinforcements. Now a small boat approached the royal galley ; and, a few minutes later, a man clad as a priest clambered on board, and threw himself at the King's feet.

"Gentle King," he cried, "your people ashore are lost, unless you hasten to their aid."

"But where are they ?" asked the King.

"In the citadel, Sire, in instant danger of being overwhelmed by their enemies, who, having agreed to

give them until three o'clock this afternoon, have broken their promise, and now seek to subdue them on your land."

"Is it so, Sir Priest?" cried the King. "Then shame on him who lags behind!" And instantly Richard gave orders for his galley to be rowed towards the shore.

There was no time for the knights to don their armour. As soon as the galley reached shallow water, Richard, with Wulf and the rest of his men, sprang overboard just as they were, and charged the Saracens who lined the shore. Other ships followed, and landed their men; and so furiously did the English attack that within an hour the harbour was won, and, bursting into the town, the rescuers fell upon the Turks within.

Meanwhile the garrison, despairing of aid, had already begun to leave the castle, preparatory to surrendering it to the Saracens, when suddenly the din of battle reached their ears, and they saw the English banners appear upon the walls of Joppa. Instantly they seized their arms, and, sallying forth, they also attacked the Saracens in the town with such fury that, caught between two enemies, they were seized with panic, and, flinging away their arms, sought only to escape. The panic thus begun soon spread to the rest of Saladin's army; and, before long, the whole mighty force was fleeing headlong from the scene of battle.

After this victory the English spent four days in repairing the walls of Joppa by piling the fallen stones

one upon another. It was exhausting work ; and on the fourth night the soldiers slept in their camp outside the town, 'weary' with incessant labour under the broiling sun. Wulf was as tired as any, and fell asleep to dream strange dreams. He seemed to hear hundreds of hammers beating in the distance. Thud ! Thud ! Thud ! On, on they went, making a ceaseless murmur of sound, until at last he awoke, and sat up, straining his ears to learn what had roused him. But the sultry night was deathly still ; and it was only when he lay down with his ears close to the ground that he picked up the mysterious sound again.

Thud ! Thud ! Thud ! What was it ? Thud ! Thud ! It seemed to be coming nearer. Suddenly Wulf sprang to his feet with a cry which woke Roger, and, sword in hand, rushed from the tent, half-clad as he was. Through the camp he dashed shouting the 'alarm, and, reaching the King's tent, cried in a loud voice, "Awake, Sire, awake ! The Saracens are upon us."

Richard was awake in a moment, and whilst he slipped a coat of mail over his night gear, Wulf ran from tent to tent and roused the sleeping knights.

The knights and footmen were soon astir ; and, as quickly as he could in the intense darkness, Richard began to array them in order of battle. Now the advancing Saracens were close at hand. The muffled tramp of their approach had become plainly audible ; then suddenly the noise ceased, and from out the darkness surrounding the camp came a sound as of men talking in subdued tones. Then the tramp, tramp began



“Awake, Sire, awake! The Saracens are upon us.”—Page 131.

again, receding farther and farther into the distance until it died away altogether.

"They have found out we are astir, and not to be taken by surprise," whispered Roger to Wulf. "Did you mark the direction of their march? It seemed to me they went towards Joppa."

Meanwhile the little army—the English mustered only about two thousand men—continued its preparations for battle. A low barricade of wood was being hastily constructed, when a messenger from the city rushed up to the King, and begged him to hasten to the aid of the garrison, which was beset by hordes of enemies.

"All in good time, Sir Messenger!" replied the King sternly. "And, as you value your life, breathe no word of this in the camp."

Then he went on to complete his order of battle, causing the spearmen to kneel behind their shields with their spears grounded in the earth, so that they presented a bristling array of spear-points to the enemy. In the second rank he drew up his crossbowmen, placing two men between each spearman, one to load and the other to shoot.

"Methinks I may now go and see what passes in the town," King Richard said to Wulf, when he had completed the array; and, addressing the army, he bade them be courageous, and fear nothing, whilst he left them for a time to see what was taking place in Joppa.

There were but six horses in the English army. Mounted on these, the King, Wulf, and four other men of rank burst their way through the encircling

Saracens, and entered the town. There they found a disorderly rabble of Turkish troops engaged in plundering, and, falling furiously upon them, the six Englishmen drove them pell-mell from the city. Having thus relieved the fears of the garrison in the citadel, King Richard ordered them to come down and guard the gates, and then returned to the camp.

By this time it was growing light, and Wulf, from his station in the line, could see the army of Saladin drawn up in dense masses of cavalry.

“What think you, Sir Wulf? Is it not a goodly sight?” said the King, pausing a moment at his side. “Methinks we shall gain much honour this day.” Then, speaking so that the whole army could hear, he cried, “Soldiers and comrades, they greatly outnumber us, ’tis true; yet has it not always been so, when we have met them in the open field? Fear nothing, keep your ranks unbroken, and, with God’s help, we shall gain the day.”

Now a stir was visible in the Saracen ranks, and with a thundering shout the first division charged forward, and burst like a mighty wave upon the little English army. But, for all their dash and courage, the Saracens could make no impression upon that bristling hedge of spears; and at last they fell back, pursued by a deadly swarm of crossbow bolts which laid many a warrior low.

They were soon followed by the second Saracen division, which also suffered defeat. And so throughout the long, hot morning the enemy charged, and charged

again, upon that living wall. In vain did Saladin launch his choicest troops against the English. No charge, however fierce, could break that line of stalwart spearmen; no bravery could face for long the storm of bolts showered upon the Saracens from the English crossbows.

At last the Saracens would charge no more, but stood glowering sullenly upon the indomitable little band they could not overcome. Even when Richard rode out between the armies, challenging the Saracens to come and fight, no man stirred. Saladin's exhortations that they should make one more charge—that it needed but one more attack, pressed well home, to overcome their insolent enemies—were heard in sullen silence, and unheeded. They had tasted the mettle of those same enemies, and had no stomach for the fray.

Saladin's own son, Ed-Daher, sprang forward to lead the charge, yet no man followed. Noon came and went, and still the two armies glowered at each other across a narrow space of ground littered with Saracen dead. One hour passed—two—and it was not until three o'clock in the afternoon that the Saracens at last responded to the passionate pleading of their Emperor, and advanced once more to the attack.

Forward they surged, a dense mass of glittering swords and spear-points which gathered speed with every stride. Half the distance was covered. The hated Christians were but a short distance away, and then suddenly a storm of bolts from the English crossbows smote the advancing hordes. Over rolled horse and warrior. The front ranks of the Saracens seemed

to melt away Beneath the deadly hail ; and then, ere the Saracens could recover from the confusion into which they had been thrown, Richard and his gallant little band of five horsemen charged headlong into their midst.

It was a mad fight. Right through the Saracen line they burst, and then rode back again. Wulf struck and struck again, until his arm ached with swinging his sword. He seemed to be in a sea of enemies ; steel seemed to threaten him from every point ; yet, none touched him. Once the Earl of Leicester was unhorsed, and King Richard and Wulf rode to his rescue. Richard himself was surrounded, yet cut a way to freedom through the ring of his enemies. Then, with a ringing shout, the English infantry flung themselves upon the Saracens.

At that the Saracens broke and fled. In vain their leaders tried to rally them. Richard's mighty prowess alone sufficed to inspire terror in every heart ; and, turning their horses, they rode panic-stricken from the field of battle.

" A great victory, and methinks our last ! " said Richard to Wulf, that evening.

It was indeed as the King said. The relief of Joppa, and the victory which the little English army gained over the Saracens, were the crowning exploits of the Crusade. Negotiations for peace were now begun in earnest, and on September 2nd, 1192, a truce for three years was arranged, whereby the Christians retained possession of all the coast from Joppa to Tyre. Saladin also promised that Christians desiring to visit Jerusalem

and the holy places of their faith should do so unmolested.

So ended the Third Crusade, and on October 9th, 1192, King Richard left Acre for England.

CHAPTER XII.

LORD OF COLENHAM.

It was a glorious spring morning some seventeen months after Wulf had quitted Palestine, and the great forest of the Weald was dressed in a cloud of misty green. Much had happened in those seventeen months. King Richard had been captured by his enemies, whilst returning home overland across Europe, and had been thrown into a German prison; and, for aught Wulf knew to the contrary, that glorious spring morning, Richard was a prisoner still.

Wulf had not returned with the King, but, with Roger and Thibaut, had sailed in a fast galley which reached Messina two weeks after leaving Palestine. There the friends had broken their voyage to visit Messer Rinaldo and Tessa; and when they left, Wulf and Thibaut had journeyed alone.

"I have naught to call me back to England," Roger had said to Wulf. "I am not a born soldier like you, Wulf, whilst Messer Rinaldo tells me I could aid him greatly in his work. So I am going to turn inventor, Wulf, and shall stay in Messina, and later, if Tessa will have me, I shall marry her."

So Wulf had wished his friend joy, and left for

England with Thibaut. They had landed at Dover twelve months before this chapter opens.

Wulf was reclining beneath a great tree, and his face grew grim as he remembered his homecoming; for he had found Hawkhurst a blackened ruin, and his mother a beggar living on the bounty of the nuns at Stone Cross. Six months before, as Wulf soon discovered, his enemy Fulk Fitz Aymon had returned to England, and, his father having died during his absence, he had assumed the rights and powers of Lord of Colenham and all the wide domains attached thereto. Nor had any dared to hinder him; for Fulk stood high in the favour of Prince John, who sought to make himself King of England in his brother's absence.

Fulk's first action had been to burn Hawkhurst to the ground, and turn the Lady Winfrid adrift in the forest. Having thus partly satisfied his revenge, he next persuaded Prince John to declare Wulf an outlaw, so that when Wulf reached England, he found not only that he was homeless, but also that he was a hunted man, with a price upon his head.

And hunted, indeed, Wulf had been. No sooner did Fulk learn of his return than he gathered his men-at-arms, and sought his enemy far and wide through the forest. But the forest contained many secret hiding-places, and, up to the present, Wulf had eluded all efforts to capture and slay him.

Of late, the pursuit had been relaxed; and, coming forth from his retreat, Wulf had gradually gathered about him all the wronged and lawless men for miles

around, so that on this spring morning he was captain of a hundred sturdy men, with Thibaut as his lieutenant. Firm discipline they maintained in their band. No lawlessness was allowed, and daily did Wulf and Thibaut practise their followers in archery and sword-play; for now Wulf's chief aim in life was to punish Fulk for his treachery, and to regain the lands which had once belonged to his ancestors.

Of Isabel, Wulf could learn little; all he knew was that she was a prisoner in her brother's castle, treated thus because she hated his lawless doings, and was the firm friend of Wulf and the Lady Winfrid.

"Captain!"

Looking up, Wulf saw Thibaut standing before him. "A boy has just arrived with news. He says it is rumoured that King Richard is free, and has already landed in England. Also, Baron Hugh of Evreux landed at Dover two days ago with twenty men-at-arms, and now rides towards Colenham Castle."

"Hugh of Evreux!" cried Wulf, springing to his feet. "What does he at Colenham?"

"I know not, captain, but I remember hearing you speak of a maid at Colenham, yet unwed. Perchance he comes as a bridegroom."

Wulf went white, and his lips set in a grim line. "Methinks you are right, Thibaut. 'Tis part of Fitz Aymon's revenge. He knows full well that the Lady Isabel and I care for each other, and so he seeks to wed her to another man. Let me think how we can stop this forced marriage; for forced I vow it is."

An hour later, Wulf and his band lay hidden along the borders of a sunken forest road. It was the road to Colenham ; and, scanning the bushes and clump of last year's bracken, no wayfarer would have known that a hundred pairs of eyes watched his every movement.

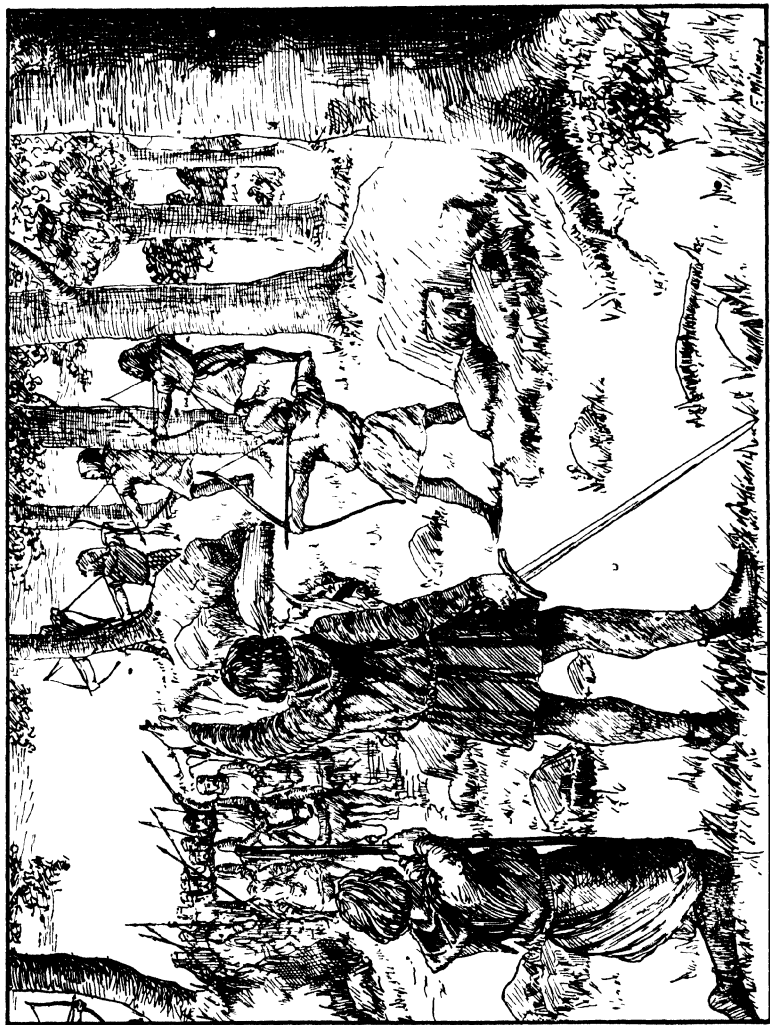
Two hours passed, and then, above the twittering of birds, another sound made itself heard—the distant tramp of iron-shod hoofs.

Nearer and nearer came the sound, and presently there rode into view a body of armed men led by a knight in full mail. On they came, all unconscious of the fierce eyes which watched them, until, as the leader arrived opposite the spot where Wulf lay concealed, a bugle rang out, and instantly, on both sides of the road, men leapt forth, and a hundred drawn bows threatened the riders below.

“Throw down your arms, or you are dead men,” cried Wulf ; and, seeing themselves thus at the mercy of the bowmen, the Norman men-at-arms flung down their weapons in token of surrender. Not so the knight, however. Clapping spurs to his horse, Hugh of Evreux dashed off along the forest road, cutting down three men who tried to bar his path.

“Shoot !” shouted Wulf, and a score of arrows whistled after the flying figure ; but though many struck their mark, none penetrated the Norman's mail, and Hugh of Evreux escaped unhurt.

“What use to have caught the pack, when the leader goes free ?” asked Wulf moodily of Thibaut, as the band returned through the forest to their camp,



‘A hundred drawn bows threatened the riders below.’—Page 140.

taking the prisoners with them. "The loss of his men-at-arms will not prevent Hugh of Evreux wedding Isabel. Ha ! but I see a way. Yon under-officer looks a sorry rogue, such as might betray his master for fear or gain. Thibaut, bring him to me, when we reach the camp. All is not lost, and we may yet rest in Colenham this night."

Twilight was darkening to night, when the watchman above the gateway of Colenham Castle saw a body of twenty riders approach, leading in their midst a man whose hands were bound, and who stumbled along on foot.

"Who goes there ?" challenged the watchman.

"Gaultier, under-officer of the Baron Hugh of Evreux, with his riders, and a noted outlaw, Wulf Oswald."

The answer caused a stir in the castle, and soon two richly dressed figures ascended to the battlements above the gateway, and peered down at the men below.

"Gaultier, how came you here ?" cried Hugh of Evreux. "When last I saw you, you were sitting your horse in craven fear of the arrows of the outlaws."

"Not so craven as you think, master," came the gruff reply. "We managed to turn the tables on the outlaws, and not only put them to flight, but captured their leader, and have brought him along, thinking you might like to have him."

It was too dark to distinguish much, or Hugh of Evreux would have thought that the faces of his followers had changed strangely since he saw them last. Also

it was too dark to distinguish the dagger which Thibaut kept pressed against Gaultier's back, ready to press it home at the first sign of betrayal.

"It is Gaultier," said Hugh to Fulk. "I can tell him by his voice. The knave must have done as he says. Can you recognize the outlaw?"

Leaning over the battlements, Fulk cried out, "Wulf, mine enemy, have I caught you at last?"

"Norman dog," answered the bound man, "I will yet do to you as you have done to me and mine."

"It is he," whispered Fulk gleefully. Then, leaning forward, he continued, "So you still threaten, you Saxon churl, even when you are in my power. Fool," he hissed, "I will alter your song, and before I have done with you you will come to me whining for mercy." Then, resuming his natural tones, he went on, "You come at a good time, Wulf Oswald. This night the noble Baron Hugh of Evreux weds my sister Isabel, and it pleases me to know you will be present at the ceremony. Ho! you there in the yard below, open the gates, and admit my guest." And Fulk Fitz Aymon laughed long and loud.

Slowly the great gates creaked open, and the cavalcade entered the castle-yard. Then, as the last files rode through the gateway, the bound outlaw suddenly flung off his bonds, and, snatching at a bugle by his side, wound a long blast which was answered almost instantly from the distant forest. The next moment Wulf had a sword in his hand, and, springing to the front, started laying about him lustily, whilst the horse-

men, drawing their weapons, fell upon the surprised garrison, shouting as they plied their swords, "An Oswald! An Oswald!"

"Treachery!" shrieked Fulk, and sped down the steps from the battlements, whilst from every part of the castle came the sound of running feet, and from every doorway armed men poured into the castle-yard. Now torches appeared, and in the ruddy light Fulk saw that Wulf had drawn up his men before the open gate, nor could the defenders reach the great doors to shut them, until the insolent little band had been slain or driven forth.

Now began a fierce fight. Wulf's outlaws were far outnumbered by Fitz Aymon's Norman retainers, but Wulf knew that help was coming swiftly from the forest, and strove only to hold the gate until the rest of his band arrived. Again and again the Normans flung themselves upon the English outlaws. Encouraged by Wulf and Thibaut, the outlaws stood firm, and, grimly holding on to what they had won, withstood every effort of the garrison to dislodge them.

"An Oswald! An Oswald!" From the country outside the castle came an answering cry, and pouring through the gateway came the rest of the outlaw band.

"An Oswald! An Oswald! An Oswald to the rescue!" Wulf flung himself forward, and, followed by Thibaut and the outlaws, slowly forced the Normans back. But not for long. Every man of the garrison was a tried soldier, and, forming a line across the castle-yard, they now resisted all the efforts of the outlaws to break

through. In vain Wulf urged his men forward. They were not so well armed as the Normans, who wore every man a coat of mail, and at last, disheartened by their losses, the outlaws began to fall slowly back.

By this time most of the torches had been extinguished, and darkness added new terrors to the fray. Soon Wulf knew the retreat would become flight, and with flight would go all hope of rescuing Isabel. He must do something. The horses! Calling Thibaut and a dozen men from the fight, he ran back to the gateway where stood the horses on which they had come thither.

Mounted upon a great war-horse, Wulf quickly marshalled his little band in a solid body, and then cried out in a voice which rang above the din of battle, "Outlaws, make way, make way!"

The cry came just in time. Already the outlaws were breaking before the steady advance of the Norman men-at-arms. Now, seeing what their leader had prepared, they took heart again, and, suddenly wheeling left and right, they left an open space through which the horsemen charged the Normans.

Like a thunderbolt Wulf and his followers struck the Norman line, and burst their way through, trampling many underfoot, and throwing the survivors into irretrievable confusion. In vain did Fulk Fitz Aymon and Hugh of Evreux try to rally their men. The outlaws gave them no time to re-form, but drove them, a broken rabble, across the castle-yard, and into the keep.

At the entrance to the keep the Normans strove to make a stand and shut the doors upon their enemies;

but Wulf and his men were not to be denied, and, in a desperately struggling, fighting mass, Normans and outlaws surged through into the great hall beyond.

Torches flared in the hall, and by their murky light was played out the last act of that desperate fray. Broken into little groups, the Norman men-at-arms struggled bravely awhile; but now the outlaws remembered past wrongs endured at the hands of these same Normans and their lord, and like wolves they flung themselves upon the remnants of the luckless garrison.

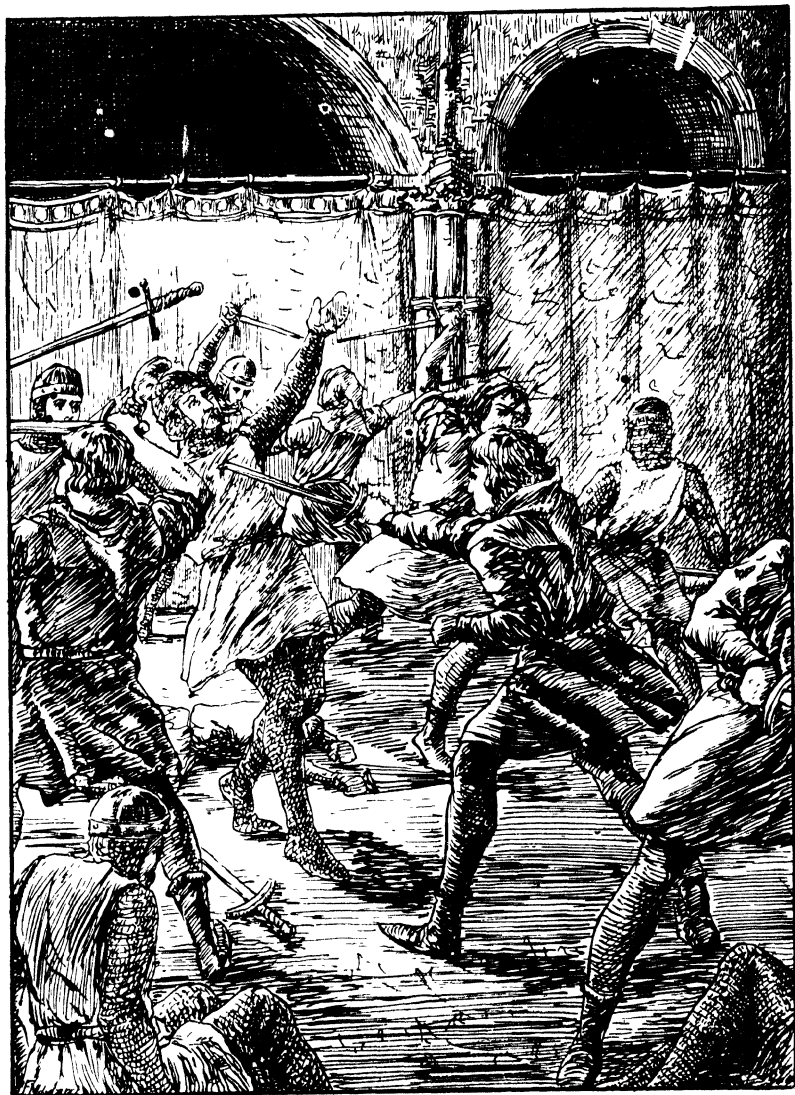
In the front rank of their men, Wulf and Thibaut fought their way up the hall, until they reached the foot of the dais whereon Fulk Fitz Aymon, Hugh of Evreux, and some half-dozen men-at-arms were gathered to make their last stand.

"Yield," cried Wulf, "and I promise you your lives. Aye, Fulk Fitz Aymon, I will give you your life a second time, so yield ere we make an end."

As Wulf ceased speaking, Fulk whispered something to Hugh of Evreux, at which the Norman smiled, and edged towards the rear of the dais; then, with a curse, Fitz Aymon flung down his sword, and signed to his followers to do likewise.

"I yield," he answered, "but by Heaven! you shall rue this night's work, Wulf Oswald. When Prince John hears of this, think you he will let you retain possession of my castle? Think you ——"

"Silence!" cried Wulf sternly; then one of his men touched his arm and whispered, "Master, the Norman, Hugh of Evreux, has gone through the door



‘Broken into little groups, the Norman men-at-arms struggled bravely.’—Page 146.

at the back of the dais, and has taken his sword with him."

A glance showed Wulf that Hugh of Evreux had indeed disappeared. The same instant he remembered Isabel, and, shouting to Thibaut to guard the prisoners, Wulf sprang upon the platform, and, tearing open the door, dashed into the passage beyond.

It was dark in the passage, and, feeling his way, Wulf reached a point where the passage branched, and there he paused irresolute. But suddenly a draught of cold air struck him in the face, and at the same moment a stifled cry for help reached his ears.

Sword in hand, Wulf raced in the direction of the cry, and, coming to an open door, found himself in the castle-yard. Some way ahead a man, bearing a heavy burden in his arms, was mounting a horse, and at the sight Wulf sprang forward with a fierce shout. "Wulf, save me!" cried Isabel; but a mocking laugh from the rider answered the appeal, and, setting spurs to his steed, Hugh of Evreux dashed towards the open gate with Wulf in vain pursuit.

But suddenly, with a cry of alarm, the horseman drew rein. Armed men were riding through the gateway, silently barring his retreat. Equally amazed, Wulf paused a moment; then, thinking that here might be Prince John with succour for Fitz Aymon, he sprang forward, calling upon Hugh of Evreux to fight, and determined at least to slay the villain before he himself was taken.

Finding escape cut off by those lines of dark, silent

figures, the Norman dropped his burden, and rode savagely at Wulf. The torches had been trampled out long ago, a new moon alone shed a fitful light upon the scene, and, seeing the black mass of his adversary bearing down upon him, Wulf sprang aside; then he struck with all his might at the dimly seen figure of his enemy. In vain the Norman strove to turn the blow. The great sword bit home, cleaving through mail of proof, and, with a cry, Hugh of Evreux flung up his arms and fell to the ground. A moment Wulf stood over him; then, seeing that the Norman did not rise, he sprang towards Isabel, cut her bonds, and raised her to her feet.

Throughout the short encounter the horsemen had sat still as statues, but now a great figure rode forward, and demanded to know who Wulf was.

"I am Sir Wulf Oswald, Lord of Hawkhurst and Colenhām," replied Wulf boldly. "Pray who are you who enter my castle thus uninvited, bringing armed men?"

The dimly seen horseman burst into a great laugh. "Who am I? I have many names, my friend, but 'twill suffice if you call me the *Knight of the Broom*."

"The King!" cried Wulf in amazement.

"Aye, Wulf, your King, ransomed and right glad to be back in his own land again. Lad, it joys my heart to see you. So you have been taking what is yours, and have entered again into the inheritance of your ancestors. Indeed, I blame you not, and what you have won you shall keep. Truth to tell, Wulf, I had word from a forester that there was some small fray going on, and rode

with al speed, hoping to be in time to aid you. Lady," he continued, turning to Isabel, "Sir Wulf is a well-loved friend of mine, and a knight of surpassin ; honour and courage. I count you lucky."

There is little more to tell. Fulk Fitz Aymon was banished from the realm, and was never seen again. Wulf and Isabel of course married, and, as Lord of Hawkhurst and Colenham, Wulf became a great and powerful noble. He was with Richard when the King died in France, and, in the following reign, was one of those barons who defied John, and upheld the cause of English liberty against that wicked King.

